

WAR MEMOIRS



à M. Lloyd George, au Premier Ministre
qui chassa les nuages d'un ciel fortorageux,
Cordialement

F. Joch

WAR MEMOIRS

OF

DAVID LLOYD GEORGE



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WAR MEMOIRS

CHAPTER LXIX

OUTLOOK FOR 1918

THE federated nations were now facing their fifth campaign. They were all exhausted and all disillusioned. The war fever had burnt itself out long ago in all the warring countries. *Spreading war-weariness* Enthusiasms had cooled down. There were no more patriotic demonstrations in the streets. Ours was the only country where anti-War organisations were allowed to pursue their activities and to organise public meetings. Even amongst the supporters of the War there was a deep and silent prayer that it would come to an end soon. But nowhere except in Russia was there any indication that the belligerent peoples were ready to give in. The struggle was kept going by that stubborn determination not to turn tail which keeps brave animals fighting as long as they can stand.

A superficial review of the appearance of the vast battlefield as a whole would lead to the conclusion that the Central Powers were winning. *Military situation* Serbia and Belgium were almost entirely in their hands. The greater part of Roumania was occupied by their troops. The Russian armies had ceased to exist as a fighting force and were rapidly disintegrating into a mutinous

rabble. The heroic if unintelligent and ill co-ordinated efforts put forth in 1917 by the armies of France and Britain to drive the Germans out of Belgium and the occupied territories of France had been sanguinary failures. So shattering had been the French repulse that it had temporarily destroyed the morale and undermined the discipline of their fine army, and, since the defeat of April, 1917, French troops could not be relied upon for any operation that involved sustained attack on a great scale. It was not certain that after a year's rest and recuperation French soldiers could be depended upon for a campaign which would involve the only kind of effort which could hope to break through the German defence. General Pétain was for concentrating on defence in 1918 and postponing the final offensive until 1919. He reckoned that by 1919 the Americans would be ready with an army that would give the Allies that overwhelming strength which would enable them to overcome the resistance of an enemy worn out by five campaigns. As to the British Army, it kept on fighting doggedly right into the December mists, but it was tired and without confidence in the wisdom of the leadership which was responsible for the stupid and squalid strategy of the last two months of Passchendaele, and for the egregious muddle which threw away the great opportunities of Cambrai.

The unsuccessful and costly offensives of 1915-1916-1917 had impaired the Allied strength and efficiency in two directions :—

*Cost of
Allied
offensives*

1. They wasted the best man-power of the Allied Nations without either attaining any strategic advantage or inflicting

corresponding, let alone greater, losses on the enemy. In these battles, as a whole, the Allies lost three men for every two who fell on the German side. Every one of these futile offensives thus reduced substantially the superiority in effective man-power which the Allies possessed at the commencement of the War. The irreparable losses amongst experienced officers and N.C.O.'s were much heavier in the French and British Armies than on the side of the enemy. This increased the weight of the adverse balance of casualties.

2. The British Army, which in June was the most formidable force on the Allied side, had fought incessantly from March up to the first week in December a series of *British Army exhausted* terrible battles without achieving any strategic results. These sanguinary attacks had succeeded, with excessive losses, in creating two fresh salients which were admitted by G.H.Q. to be untenable. That is, the ghastly sacrifices of our fine Army had increased the strategic advantages of the enemy. The Expeditionary Force was weary in body and spirit. To quote the words of the French Official History of the War :—

“ It was manifest now at the beginning of winter that the English Army was passing through a phase of weariness, a consequence of the substantial and sustained efforts put up throughout the summer ; it was at length beginning to experience the gravest difficulty in reconstituting its forces ; in mid-December, its infantry showed a deficit of 116,000 men.”*

* “ Les armées françaises dans la grande guerre,” Vol. VI.

Haig talked about "the fatigue of his forces"; he alluded to them as his "weary and depleted units," pleaded that "having been engaged on the offensive since the spring" his army had been unable to devote either adequate men or time to the organisation of the British Front for the defensive.

Both the fatigue and the depletion due to these ceaseless offensives played a great part in the British unpreparedness for meeting the enemy assault in the spring. The pervading weariness prejudicially affected the physique, the training and the tone of the whole Army, from the High Command to the infantry in the trenches and the labour battalions who had been working incessantly behind the lines. Nervous and mental lassitude can alone explain the extraordinary indecision and inactivity of our G.H.Q. which characterised the three months that followed the end of the 1917 campaign. It permeated mind as well as muscle.

The effect on our reserves of the slaughter that never for one hour stopped either day or night for four months was inevitable. When the Cabinet Committee were considering in June, 1917, the Commander-in-Chief's proposals for an advance in Flanders, Sir William Robertson calculated, on the basis of estimates furnished by G.H.Q., that 130,000 men would cover the losses sustained on the whole British Front during the period of the offensive. We actually sent to France during the progress of the battle a much larger number to make up losses. As Sir William Robertson told Field-Marshal Haig in his letter of 3rd November, 1917, the Government had done better in the matter of infantry drafts to France during 1917 than they had promised. Haig had

*Casualties
exceed
estimates*

been informed that the numbers which would be sent to France between March 1st and October 31st would amount to 356,000. The drafts actually sent totalled 376,000 men. The ghastly massacres of the Flanders campaign completely falsified the estimates of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff ; the total casualties on the whole British Front during the progress of the battle mounted up to the appalling figure of 399,000 men—three times the official military estimate. The infantry bore the brunt of these casualties. Had the original forecast been justified, there would have been an increase in the actual numbers of our combatant strength on the Western Front of 160,000 instead of a deficit of 100,000 men. For the massacre of brave men that won just four miles of indefensible mud the Government were not prepared by any warning or prediction given us by the military leaders. When we discovered what the actual deficit was, no conceivable measures taken by us then could have closed that bleeding gash before the end of March.

What about the German fatigue and losses in this campaign ? They also were kept fighting until the first week in December, but their casualties were far less than ours. Their total *State of German Army* losses on the British Front between July 1st and December 31st, 1917, amounted to 270,000. Had the casualties we inflicted on them been equal to those we sustained, the Germans could not have claimed any superiority in numbers for the spring offensive.

What about the tiredness of the German troops who had been engaged in these conflicts ? Most of our soldiers had been flung into the battle of the morass between July and December ; just over

half of the German forces on the Western Front had fought in the Flanders campaign, and there was no exceptional strain placed upon the divisions which held the rest of the line. Moreover, the continuous stream of divisions that was brought over from Russia between December and March had already enjoyed a period of prolonged rest on that front. For months the fighting in Russia had been quite negligible. Their task was tedious but not tiring. These contrasts constituted the most serious disadvantage in which we were placed by the events of the last few months. There is some controversy as to whether we had more combatants on the Western Front than the Germans possessed on the 21st March, 1918, or whether there was a small percentage in their favour. Even if the latter estimate were correct, a slight superiority, which would not appear till March, in the numbers of the German infantry would not have put in jeopardy an army defending prepared positions against an attack by troops who had all passed through the same exhausting experiences as themselves. The Germans had held the Western Front for two years against a combination which was 50 per cent. stronger than their own as far as numbers were concerned. The Allies, in spite of German reinforcements from the Eastern Front, had a considerable superiority in the West in the matter of guns, aeroplanes, tanks and machine-guns.

What was the position on the Austro-Italian Front? The Italian Army had been beaten and broken in one of the most disastrous defeats sustained by the Allied Powers since the early days of the War. It was being reformed and reconstituted, but that process would take time. Nothing much in the way of a serious offensive

Italian Front

could be expected from the Italians during the campaign of 1918.

There were two areas in the vast battle where the Allies had done well. On the ocean the British Fleet were beating off the submarine attack, and in the East the British Armies had driven two Turkish Armies before them in headlong rout, captured some of the most famous cities in history, and reduced the Turkish Empire to such a state of exhaustion that one more resolute push would make it crumble to bits. The Turkish Army was utterly demoralised ; its establishments were reduced by desertion to a half : so that in every regiment there was one deserter from the colours for every man that remained.

Nevertheless, taking East and West as a whole, on balance the *land* campaign had gone unmistakably in favour of the Central Powers. The less spectacular, but more decisive, fact of Britain's renewed command at sea was at the time not recorded and was ignored by the military advisers of the Allies. All they knew was that supplies of ammunition and food reached them regularly and in increasing quantities. The way to ultimate triumph was sought by great Generals on land. The life and death struggle on the great waters was never alluded to by the military chiefs of the Alliance, except in so far as it was used as an argument for withholding reinforcements of troops and munitions to remote battle areas. There is not a hint in any military appreciation by the British or French Staff of the events of 1917 or of the prospects for 1918, that the issue of the struggle with the submarines would ultimately decide the fate of the War.

The military situation at the end of the 1917 campaign thus gave a misleading impression of the relative position of the contending nations and of the actual progress of the War and of its prospects. The German leaders—both military and civilian—realised better the actual state of affairs. Documents revealed since the War display the great anxiety felt by both the German High Command and the political chiefs on two questions : food, and the weakening of Germany's allies. In these two respects the situation was becoming so critical that the German High Command agreed that a final decision must be forced early in 1918, as it was considered unlikely that the Central Powers could feed their populations or that the tottering allies of the Fatherland could or would stagger through into 1919. These allies were fast becoming liabilities, not assets. To use Herr Hitler's striking phrase, the fate of Germany was entangled in a "coalition of cripples." The military ardour of Germany's allies was evaporating for many causes. The Turkish and Bulgarian peasants realised that they were being sacrificed in a quarrel which was not their own. The Turkish officers were sulky with resentment at the imperious Germans who bullied and shouted about inefficiencies and ineptitudes which were part of the tradition of the Turkish Army. The Turk was made to feel more and more that this was a German War, and that his interests were made subservient to those of the arrogant Goth. He saw that he was not fighting for Islam. Two groups of infidel nations were struggling for mastery. Which of them won was no concern of his. The Anatolian peasant therefore deserted the army not only by the thousand, but by the hundred thousand.

*German
estimates
of outlook*

Our lost opportunity in Turkey These facts must have been known to the Intelligence Department of our War Office, or at least, they ought to have been known. They were however withheld from the War Cabinet. For the War Cabinet was predisposed to strike a blow there, to disintegrate the Turks still more, to eliminate them completely ; so a bandage had to be kept on its eyes, lest the realities of the situation should unduly encourage it to take exceptional measures to exploit Turkish disintegration in order to eliminate that Empire from the War. One-fifth of the men uselessly sacrificed at Paschendaele could have achieved that end, and put the Turks out of business by the end of 1917. The large British forces engaged on the two Turkish Fronts would have been available partly to reinforce our Army in France, partly to strengthen our troops on the Vardar. Bulgaria, with her Turkish flank uncovered, could not have resisted an attack. Roumania would then have revived her effort and Austria would thus have been out-flanked, and the effect on Russia would have been incalculable. Nothing but substantial help given by Germany in troops and equipment could have saved a break-up of the Central Alliance.

Advice of Versailles experts The first intimation given to us of the actual military situation in Turkey was in the famous paper prepared by the military advisers at Versailles which is known as Note 12.* But the Germans were fully aware of the deplorable state of the Turkish forces, and it was one of the circumstances that drove them to the inevitable conclusion that their Far Eastern

* The text of Note 12 is given on page 2744.

ally might not be able to see them through 1918—certainly not beyond that year. As to Bulgaria, her peasant soldiers were heartily tired of the War. Their traditional enemies, the Turks, were now their allies. Their Serbian foes were a broken and a fugitive remnant in a strange land. The Bulgarian people were never united on the wisdom of joining the Central Alliance, and now Bulgarian fields were neglected, the harvests were disappointing, the cultivators lived in trenches on the bleak slopes of the Balkans, far from their beloved plains. What for? The peasant is a slow thinker, but although his mind travels slowly, he plods unerringly to the end of his journey, and he ultimately realised that all his privations and perils were endured, not for the honour, the security or the enlargement of Bulgaria, which could have been better assured by a timely understanding with the Western Powers, but in order to achieve the domination of the Teuton in Eastern Europe. This growing conviction weakened the fine fighting mettle of the Bulgarian soldiers. They became less and less eager to incur the risks and discomforts of this endless, and for them purposeless, war.

The General Staffs of the Western Powers do not seem to have understood what was going on, for they anticipated a strong enemy offensive in the Balkans as part of the troubles for which they had to provide in 1918. It appeared to them probable that the Germans and Austrians might divert to the Balkans some of the divisions released from Russia and this contingency caused them much apprehension. Only towards the autumn of the year 1918 did they discover how completely the fighting spirit of the

*Bulgarian
weakness*

Bulgarian Army had evaporated. But the Germans knew it well by the end of 1917. This aggravated their worry about the issue of the War if it were prolonged into the autumn of 1918.

But there is something still worse. The War Cabinet was left in ignorance not only of the Balkan, but also of the Austrian situation. Facts that have come to our knowledge since the War demonstrated clearly that by the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918 Austria was almost at the point of collapse, owing to the food situation in that country, and General von Arz made urgent representations from Vienna to the German G.H.Q., in December, 1917, that "a number of armies had not even a single day's ration of flour in their possession."* The Army rations had to be severely cut down early in January, and it was reported officially that "the conditions were in fact of such a kind that only the endurance of the severest deprivations made it possible for them [Austria] to hold out."* The plenipotentiary of the Imperial War Food Ministry in Vienna, Baron von Raberau, reported on 20th January, 1918 :—

"Whether Austria will be in a position to last out through February is questionable. . . .

Without any kind of reserves people will be living day by day from hand to mouth."*

He implies that help from Germany is essential even to postpone the collapse until February, and he adds :—

"How far Germany still has an interest in supporting Austria will have to be regarded, no longer

* Report of the Reichstag Commission, Vol. III.

merely from the standpoint of German food supply, but as a question of high policy.”*

Seidler, President of the Austrian Ministry, and Landwehr, Austrian General of Supplies, reported :—

“ The situation is as follows : Without help from outside, masses of the people will be dying in a few weeks. Germany and Hungary will contribute no more.”*

The Germans were in no position to contribute. Their own population was already suffering from the food shortage. The vitality of the people at home was being lowered. Even the men in the trenches had to be rationed severely, in some important ingredients of food. But Herr Seidler's reference to Hungary has a meaning. It shows that both the Germans and the Austrians were convinced that Hungary had a surplus of corn and meat but that she selfishly appropriated it for her own needs. That conviction was ominous ; it was another sign of the approaching disruption in the ramshackle Empire. The Allied Governments were not fully apprised of the real condition of things in Austria-Hungary. It was vital to decision on the plans for 1918 that these facts should be known. But if the Army Intelligence Departments were in possession of the truth they did not pass it on to their respective Governments. Ludendorff and his Staff, however, knew it, and so did the Kaiser and his Ministers, and they came to the conclusion that Germany must anticipate that the structure of her alliances would crumble away before the end of 1918. Her own food situation was becoming more and more precarious. Even a good

* Report of the Reichstag Commission, Vol. III.

harvest would leave her with a shortage of 300,000 tons of corn, and her meat and milk supplies were quite inadequate to meet the minimum requirements of her Army and her population. There was a crippling shortage of fodder for the horses at the front. This, coupled with the lack of sufficient rubber, lubricants and petrol, reduced seriously the mobility of the German Army. Not merely was there an inadequate supply of draught-horses, but the deficiency of grain to keep up their strength considerably impaired their value. These conditions, whether they were known or not to the Allied Staffs, never seemed to be taken into account in their comparisons of the relative capacity of the two armies for waging such a campaign as was anticipated in 1918. Rapidity of movement was essential on both sides for conducting an offensive on a great scale, now on one part and then on another part of the front. It is computed by competent military authorities that, owing to these shortages in the essentials of transport, no more than a third of the German Army could be regarded as mobile, the remaining two-thirds not being equipped with the necessary means of removal from one sector to another.

When we come to the story of the campaign of 1918, this paramount consideration will account for the long intervals which supervened between one great German attack and another, even when the time left to them was short and fast running out. During these anxious weeks, when every day we anticipated a renewal of the attack before we were able to reorganise a new front, I was at a loss to understand why Ludendorff gave us so much time to reinforce and reform our broken divisions, and

*German
transport
problem*

to dig and wire formidable new positions. On the other hand, when the fateful moment came for Foch to launch his offensive he gave the German Army no time for restoration or reformation. The difference in the temperament of these two great soldiers is not altogether responsible for the contrast in their methods. It was largely a question of the mobility of the rival armies. The Allies were abundantly supplied with the means of transport to and from railheads. I was given a striking illustration of the extent to which deficiencies of transport hampered the movement of the German Army at a critical juncture by the late Hugo Stinnes. In the course of a conversation I had with him after the War, I asked him to explain why the victorious German Army did not capture Amiens in March, 1918. I informed him that they had already got through all our defences, and that we had no organised forces between the German advance guard and that city. He said it was entirely due to the breakdown in their transport, owing to the lack of rubber. There was a sharp snowstorm, the rubberless wheel rims became clogged, and it was impossible to bring up the necessary ammunition for the troops and for the guns. The soldiers could not even be fed.

The shortage of food in Central Europe indirectly diminished the number of German and Austrian troops that could be released for operations in the west owing to the Russian peace. The only hope which the Central Powers had of obtaining supplies of food and certain essential raw materials was in the exploitation of Russia. This could not be done without employing considerable forces in the occupation of the Russian cornfields and in pushing forward into the regions

*Supplies from
Russia*

where oil was obtainable. These garrison and far-distant raiding columns absorbed a number of both German and Austrian divisions. Most of them, but not all, were of secondary quality, but even these, if brought to the west, could have occupied quiet sectors and could have released fighting divisions for the battle front. They would also have been helpful as labour battalions.

¶ All these considerations drove the German General Staff to the conclusion that a decision must be forced at the earliest possible moment.

That is why the German High Command did not attach overwhelming importance to the American Army. They did not anticipate that its
German estimate of American menace intervention would count for a great deal until late in the campaign of 1918.

They were confident of destroying one or other or both of the Allied Armies in France before the Americans were in a position to render effective aid. Their information as to the progress of American recruitment, training and equipment was on the whole accurate. They knew that a vast number of men had been called to the colours in the United States of America, but they also knew that their training was very deficient and their equipment utterly inadequate. They were also fully persuaded that "the preoccupation of tonnage with the supplying of the Entente excluded any extensive transport of troops, especially so long as the U-boat warfare was being maintained." Their conclusion on this point was "We need not therefore bother about the question as to the extent to which the Entente is in a position to bring strong American forces to Europe."*

* Reichstag Committee: General Von Kuhl's Report on the American troops.

It is true that by the beginning of 1918 the check received by the submarine owing to the establishment of the convoy system forced the German Intelligence Department to revise their estimates. But even then they did not foresee what British shipping was capable of achieving under the pressure of a great emergency. They also underrated the fighting qualities of the American divisions that were brought over. They did not doubt the excellence of the material, but they did not think it possible to train it in time for use except in quiet sectors of the Western Front. The Germans calculated that only a comparatively small proportion of the American Army could be put into the fighting line during the critical months of 1918. In this respect both the French and British military authorities were of the same opinion. Pétain thought the American Army would not count until 1919 ; our G.H.Q. were just as contemptuous of the arrival of American reinforcements and even more of their utility when they landed.

A perusal of the documents written during the War, whether on the side of the Germans or the Allies, reveals that both were in the dark. The fog of war was everywhere : we can see how apt adversaries in any conflict are to miscalculate each other's strength and weaknesses, each other's opportunities and resources. Some difficulties are exaggerated, others are underestimated or altogether ignored. The strength of opponents is in some respects under-assessed and in others over-stated. These errors are by no means confined to military problems. They occur in politics, in law and in business. It is difficult to judge at any given moment whether these misconceptions constitute the basis of a given policy, or whether the policy has

Mutual miscalculations

not inspired the miscalculation. Is an erroneous estimate of the facts responsible for the strategy, or is the strategy already determined upon responsible for the false manipulation of facts? As far as the Great War is concerned, time and reflection will ultimately provide the answer. As the years go by, and the realities stand out more clearly, and as personal prejudices fade or are eliminated, and more impartial conclusions can be derived from a calm survey of indisputable facts, it will be easier to reach a decision on these questions.

The Allied Staffs had not a monopoly in the realm of illusions. General Ludendorff was convinced that the pacifist movement in Britain was formidable and was growing in power day by day. He was of opinion that a reeling blow struck at the British Army would precipitate a political crisis in England, throw out of office what he conceived to be a bellicose and implacable War Ministry, and substitute for it a more pacific and amenable combination headed by Mr. Asquith and Lord Lansdowne. His Staff papers published by him since the War show what a part this estimate of the political possibilities in Britain played in his strategical schemes.

Did the necessity for finding arguments in favour of a great offensive tempt him to exaggerate the reports he received, or was the information which came to him the reason which prompted him to decide in favour of an offensive? On the other side Marshal Haig was persuaded that the German Army had exhausted its reserves early in October, that the terrible blows he was inflicting upon it at Passchendaele were destroying its morale, that 135 divisions were already pulverised and that the Germans

were therefore not in a condition to resist an offensive on the Passchendaele Front continued up till November and then resumed in the spring. Did his ardour for the offensive he had planned and prosecuted colour his information, or did his information determine his strategy? Events which it will now be my duty to set forth show clearly how both Ludendorff and Haig were misled as to the fundamental facts which ought to have shaped their strategic plans; partly by informants upon whom they relied, partly by their own predispositions; and in each case their war plans were necessarily faulty. In the case of the German Army it led to irretrievable disaster. Ultimately in the case of the British Army the projected renewal of the Flanders offensive in the spring, when the Germans were at their strongest and the Allies at the greatest disadvantage, was overruled and irreparable catastrophe was averted.

CHAPTER LXX

THE BELLIGERENTS STATE THEIR PEACE TERMS

WERE no efforts made to stop all this horrible slaughter of brave men in many lands? There were tentative approaches and soundings.

*War-
weariness
of Austria*

Towards the end of 1917 informal communications were received by us through Switzerland which indicated that Austria and Turkey were anxious to bring the War to an end by negotiation. They were both in a bad way. In spite of the overthrow of Russia and the signal defeat inflicted on Italy, the internal situation in Austria was extremely serious. Food supplies were so short that parts of the Empire were on the verge of starvation, and even in the Army it was difficult to feed the troops. The Slavonic populations were never enthusiastic about the War, and economic conditions produced discontent even in the Germanic areas of the Empire. The Emperor and his advisers were apprehensive of uprisings which might end in Revolution. The Cabinet, whilst naturally anxious to avoid futile *pourparlers* like those initiated by Prince Sixte's letters, which excited so much suspicion in the breasts of Italian statesmen, were alive to the importance of detaching Austria from the Central Alliance. They were convinced that the time had not come for entering into general peace negotiations. Germany was in no mood for conceding any terms which would be acceptable to the Allies or to America.

She had humbled Russia to the dust. She had destroyed the Roumanian Army and was consuming Roumanian corn and drawing oil supplies from Roumanian wells. She had beaten off our attack on Flanders and had helped Austria to put the Italian Army to flight. She was far from being convinced that her submarine campaign had failed. She was still sinking our ships, and with her accession of fresh strength which came from the release of divisions from the Russian Front she was preparing a crashing attack on the exhausted French and British Armies in the West. A Peace Conference with such a Germany would give us none of our objectives and was only attainable on terms which would have left German militarism triumphant over all its foes. The point for the Cabinet to consider in all their Swiss feelers was whether there was any chance of effecting a separate peace with either Austria or Turkey, or with both.

When it was intimated to us that the Austrian Prime Minister, Count Czernin, was willing to send Count Mensdorff to Switzerland to meet a representative of the British Cabinet to discuss Peace, we felt that the dispatch of such a messenger constituted the best proof that the Austrian Government was in earnest in seeking a peaceable accommodation of the bloody quarrel. For us, Mensdorff was a highly acceptable emissary. Before the War he was one of the best liked and most trusted of the foreign Ambassadors in this country. We decided therefore to send General Smuts to meet him in Switzerland. General Smuts was to be accompanied by Mr. Philip Kerr (now Lord Lothian), who was on my staff. Their instructions were to confine themselves to the dis-

*Smuts and
Kerr to meet
Mensdorff*

cussion of a separate peace with Austria and not to be drawn into any conversation as to the terms of a general peace. They were also to ascertain through our Minister there what value there was in the approaches which had been made to him ostensibly from Turkish sources.

I give General Smuts's account of the conversations that took place. His report is an historical document of the first importance. It is a remarkable contemporary record of a frank interchange of views which took place at a critical stage of the War between one of the most experienced, as well as one of the ablest and sanest diplomatists of the time on the one hand, and on the other, one of the most enlightened statesmen of the day. Apart from the fact that it puts clearly before us the opinion thus formed by men of high intelligence as to the problems of peace, it has also a special value as representing very fairly the conclusions formed by men of calm judgment on either side, not only as to the attitude but also as to the military position of the belligerents at the end of 1917.

"December 18-19, 1917.

I reached Geneva on the morning of 18th December and had a short interview with Count Mensdorff in a quiet suburb in the outskirts of Geneva. I had another long conversation with him in the afternoon, and a third conversation in the evening of the same day. I proceed to summarise the principal points of interest which emerged from these conversations.

Before leaving London I discussed separately with the Prime Minister and Mr. Balfour the line

I should take in these conversations, and I conceived that the objects of my mission were twofold : first, to instil into the minds of the Austrians that in case they freed themselves from German domination and made a fresh start in sympathy with the British Empire they would have our full sympathy and support ; and secondly, to gather as much information as possible while declining to enter into a general discussion of peace terms so far as the Germans were concerned.

As will appear from the sequel the conversations have been fruitful in both these respects. A

*No separate
peace possible
with Austria* third object which I had in mind was, if possible, to induce the Austrians to conclude a separate peace ; but the

subject was from many points of view a risky one to open, as I was anxious to avoid laying ourselves open to the charge in future of having intrigued with the Austrians for a separate peace. Before I reached this point in our discussions, however, Mensdorff saved me from the difficulties of my task by taking the initiative himself in declaring that a separate peace was for Austria entirely out of the question, that it would be madness on her part even to entertain the idea, that her circumstances rendered it impossible for her to carry it out, and that bad as her plight was it was not so desperate that she would do anything so treacherous and dishonourable. He said that she was not going to follow the example of Italy, and at the close of the conversations he returned to the subject and pointed out once more in the strongest language that a separate peace was not to be thought of. Austria was prepared to do anything to secure an honourable peace short of deserting

her ally during the War. I gathered the impression that Mensdorff thought that the principal object of my mission was to discuss a separate peace, and I am therefore glad that I did not raise the point, but left it to be raised by him, which he did in the strongest language possible, and with evident sincerity.

I opened the conversations by saying that I had come in response to the numerous unofficial overtures from Austria which had reached us both through Holland and Switzerland in recent months. We thought it only courteous that some definite response should be made to these overtures and that an opportunity should be given to hear what Austria had to say. I pointed out to him that the friendly feeling towards Austria which had existed among the British people before the War had by no means disappeared, that a great deal of sympathy continued to be felt for Austria, especially as she was looked upon not so much as a principal antagonist, but valued as having been used by Germany both in the policy which led to the War, as well as during the course of the War. The downfall of Russia had created fresh anxiety for the political future of Europe, and it was feared in many influential quarters that unless some counterweight was established on the Continent to Germany in the place of Russia, the future peace of Europe might continue to be precarious. From this point of view it was a matter of grave concern that Austria should no longer continue her rôle of subordination to Germany, that she should be emancipated from German domination, and should, with the assistance of the Entente, and especially of the British Empire, make a fresh start of complete independence *vis-à-vis* the German

Empire. If Austria was prepared to play that rôle and break with Germany she would have not only our sympathy but our active support, and we would do everything in our power to uphold and strengthen her and to assist her economic reconstruction.

To this Mensdorff replied that he was most gratified to hear this, and all the more so because the last word which we had spoken officially in regard to this matter was in the Allied reply to President Wilson's Note at the beginning of 1917, in which the practical break-up and partition of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was foreshadowed as one of our principal war aims. I assured him that that note never had had such an intention, and that its object, and still more our object now, was to assist Austria to give the greatest freedom and autonomy to her subject nationalities. The best way to strengthen the bonds of sympathy between the British and Austro-Hungarian people was to liberalise as much as possible the local institutions of Austria-Hungary. We had no intention of interfering in her internal affairs, but we recognised that if Austria could become a really liberal Empire in which her subject peoples would, as far as possible, be satisfied and content, she would become for Central Europe very much what the British Empire had become for the rest of the world.

She would become a League of Free Nations, very largely free from the taint of militarism, and she would have a mission in the future even greater than her mission in the past. Looking to the future of Europe, and the new orientation which it

*Austria
fears
partition*

*Smuts
urges a
liberal
autonomy*

was necessary to give to the published policy of Europe, it seemed to thoughtful people in England that the above rôle was not only the nobler one for Austria-Hungary, but was also necessary in order to secure the full sympathy and co-operation of the Entente, and especially of the British Empire and America, and was still more necessary to prevent any future military dictatorship in Europe with its promise of fresh troubles for the world. For all this it seemed to me absolutely necessary that Austria should become entirely dissociated from the German Empire and should establish the friendliest relations with those Entente Powers that were actuated by fundamental pacific tendencies. I continued to labour this point with him and to point out what a success the British Empire had made of the government of divers races and peoples, and that Austria, by following the same liberal policy—a policy directed to the peaceful self-development of its peoples through the widest local autonomy—could probably achieve a no less striking success in Central Europe, and that peoples not now directly within her orbit might be drawn to her in future by the attractions of her new policy. For her, peace and liberty were as essential as for the British Empire, and now that Russia had disappeared as the principal military danger upon her flank there was no reason why she should not adopt this policy and lean more and more towards the British Empire and dissociate herself from German militarism.

Mensdorff replied that these views would find the heartiest response in the most influential quarters in Austria-Hungary. Austrian statesmen were determined to make a fresh start after the War, but

he emphasised once more that nothing could be done to break away from Germany or to begin the new policy while the War lasted. The views which I had expressed with regard to the political future of Austria-Hungary would appeal very deeply to its rulers. He knew that both the Emperor and Count Czernin were actuated very much by sentiments similar to those which I had expressed. Czernin, he said, was not a diplomat of the old school, but a young statesman descended from the ancient Royal House of Bohemia, full of lofty political idealism, and determined to see an end to all this military régime which has been the undoing of Europe. The views which he had so strongly and repeatedly expressed in favour of general disarmament and a League of Nations to safeguard the public order of Europe after this war, represented his deepest political convictions, and had incurred the wrath of influential sections of the German people. Mensdorff regretted that no word of sympathy had come from England for the policy stated by Czernin. Instead they in Austria had met only either with cold disdainful silence or the sneers of the Press. He hoped that it would still be possible for British statesmen publicly to extend their sympathy to Czernin's views, and in that way to create a better atmosphere for solving the problems of the future.

I pointed out in reply to this that the views of the British Government were perfectly well known to be favourable to a League of Nations, and that our leading statesmen had repeatedly expressed their agreement with President Wilson in that regard. But we felt very strongly that the mere machinery

*Essential
conditions for
a League
of Nations*

of a League of Nations would not only be useless, but would be positively dangerous unless it was established on the basis of a satisfactory peace, a peace which would not leave Germany in military predominance on the Continent, and which, in its territorial aspects, would as far as possible satisfy the principle of nationality. The German Empire had developed unsuspected military strength and predominance during this war, and the British people felt that whether Germany was inside or outside a League of Nations, it would, through the military power which it had developed, be able, at any time, to wreck the good work of the League. The danger and fear which have overhung Europe and led to this war would continue to exist, and anxiety among the other nations for their future would continue to stimulate them to fresh military preparations. It was therefore essential for a League of Nations that the German military domination should be broken in this war, and that the political dispositions of Central Europe after the War should afford some safeguard against its re-establishment.

He said in reply to this that we were evidently underrating the new developments in Germany which were making for a new order. The Parliamentarisation of Germany had already proceeded much further than was commonly appreciated, and the effect of the repeated Chancellor crises was that it had now become impossible to have a government in Germany without a majority in the Reichstag. That was the real inwardness of all the obscure crises which had recently taken place. If we expected more at present and looked forward to a revolution in Germany during the War we

were much mistaken. The German working-classes were highly educated, and had developed great political capacity (*Regierungsfähigkeit*), and even before the War the Socialist Party in Germany was the most powerful in Europe. But they certainly were not going to follow the example of the Russians, nor would they betray their country while it was in danger; and it was generally anticipated that as soon as the War was over and the armies returned from the fronts, and the German people settled down again there would be the most far-reaching political changes. To my observation that the German civil government seems rather to have lost ground in comparison with the General Staff, whose efficiency had more and more established its predominance in Germany during the War, he replied with a contemptuous gesture that the whole military régime would be blown away as soon as the War was over and the German people could speak.

He then tried to get on to general peace terms and said that in his opinion the time had come to open informal discussions between Great Britain and Germany, and if Austria as a friendly party could be used as an intermediary she would be highly gratified. I thanked him, but said that the time for discussing peace terms with the Germans had certainly not come, that neither the British public nor the British Government were in a temper to discuss peace with the German Government, and that our conversations should be confined entirely to questions affecting Austria-Hungary. To this he agreed, but with evident regret, and several times thereafter he made attempts to open a general discussion of German terms

of peace, but was constantly met by a blank refusal by me to enter into a discussion of this topic.

The conversation then drifted on to territorial questions in connection with the peace, which might affect Austria-Hungary. Mensdorff himself raised the question of *Problem of Poland* Poland, which, he said, from its superior culture had rather a Western than an Eastern orientation. I said it was essential from the point of view which we had been discussing that the future Polish Kingdom should not have a German orientation. He replied that there was little fear of that ; that owing to the liberal policy that Austria had followed the future Polish State was much more likely to co-operate with Austria than with Germany. I said that we were pledged to an independent Kingdom or State of Poland, but that if Austria really broke away from Germany and realised the mission sketched out above, the possibility of some link of a personal or a loose nature between Austria and Poland was not excluded, and that the addition of Galicia to Poland might be a desirable move from that point of view. He said that a solution of the Polish question on those lines would commend itself to Austria-Hungary and might even appeal to the Poles themselves. There were constitutional difficulties, but he thought that it was possible to bring the future larger Poland within the orbit of the Austrian Empire of the future.

I asked him next if some such solution was found of the Polish question and Austrian influence was thereby greatly increased that means should be

found to satisfy the reasonable claims of those States to whom we were pledged by various promises made during the War, such as Serbia, Roumania, and Italy. He said that he

Serbia

thought the case of Serbia did not present much difficulty so far as Austria was concerned. Austria disliked the Karageorgevitch dynasty which was founded on assassination, and would welcome guarantees which would prevent Serbia from becoming once more a centre of anti-Austrian intrigue. He also thought that Bulgaria would hold on to the Bulgarian parts of Serbia and that it would be a wise policy to acquiesce in her doing so. I replied that Serbia might in that case legitimately claim compensation, and that it was worthy of consideration whether the best policy even from the Austrian point of view was not to follow the principle of nationality and add Bosnia-Herzegovina to Serbia and bring Serbia into the Dalmatian coast, and to bring the greater Serbia thus constituted into a more friendly relation with Austria-Hungary. He asked what relation I meant, whether it was a loose political union or some economic union. I replied that I could not say, and that it was a question in which Serbia would have to be consulted, but that it seemed to me essential if the foundations of a future peaceful Europe were to be laid that rearrangements on a national basis should as far as possible be effected, and that a far-sighted policy followed by Austria now might conciliate the Southern Slav peoples and assist her to realise the great mission and position which might be in store for her. I pointed out that Russia would no longer be there to foment anti-Austrian feeling

among the Southern Slavs and that was the best guarantee which Austria could have for the future. The rest must be left to wise statesmanship, and sound territorial arrangement. Mensdorff appeared to me to be not unfavourable to this point of view which I was urging, although he did not openly commit himself. When, however, I came to Roumania he became somewhat excited and said that Roumania was finished and that they would do nothing for that treacherous State, and Hungary would refuse to surrender an inch of territory to Roumania, and that his brother-in-law, Count Apponyi, who was really a pacifist, had assured him only a few days ago that Hungary would fight to the last ditch rather than surrender any territory to Roumania. Mensdorff added that it was only a fringe of Transylvania which was inhabited by Roumanians. I pointed out in reply that considerable parts of Bukovina and Bessarabia had a predominantly Roumanian population, and that as Bulgaria was also claiming the Bulgarian part of Dobrudja, the question of bringing together the Roumanian people into one State was one well worthy of consideration and that it was in the interest of Austria-Hungary to have a friendly and satisfied Roumania on her flank. He said that Bukovina was on a different footing from Transylvania, and that he hoped that no proposals would be made which meant any partition of Hungarian territory as this would be most fiercely resisted by the Hungarians. Bessarabia was, of course, a question in which Austria was not concerned, and I did not gather that he was opposed to my suggestion so far as Bukovina was concerned.

Italy * This brought us on to Italy. Mensdorff asked how we could defend the national principle in connection with the promises which we had made to Italy in the Balkans, where we had promised to Italy territories which contained few Italians and a predominantly Slav or Slovene population. He also asked how it was possible if we were favourably disposed towards the future Austria-Hungary that we could think of practically cutting her off from outlets to the sea and planting the Italians on both shores of the Adriatic. Apart from Dalmatia, Trieste had never belonged to Italy, had voluntarily decided centuries ago to come under Austria and had been under Austria ever since. Austria would never agree to Trieste being wrenched from her or to be deprived of proper access to the Adriatic. Italy had no right to be at Valona either.

I did not want to discuss these questions with him as I was not fully conversant with them but it seemed to me indisputable from every point of view that the Trentino should be ceded to Italy. The strategic frontier of Italy in the north was impossible, and Trentino was an almost entirely Italian population. To his observation that after the treachery of Italy there was no disposition to make any concessions to her, I replied that Italy would never have been induced to desert Austria if the latter did not sit on territory which Italy could legitimately claim to be hers, and that from the point of view of future peace and security it seemed to me desirable in the highest interests of Austria to suppress all feelings of resentment towards Italy, to deal with her on high statesmanlike lines,

and by the surrender to her of the Trentino to secure a friend and ally in Italy. To this he made no further objection, and I did not press him any further on the point. My own feeling was that Austria would be prepared for a deal, although he did not expressly say so.

In all this discussion of territorial questions I purposely abstained from going too deeply into details at this stage, as I intended merely to have a preliminary canter over the ground in order to satisfy myself in my capacity as a scout of the general attitude of the Austrians on the question of territorial concessions. The impression I formed was that the Austrian mind was in an accommodating mood, and that moderate and reasonable proposals from us would meet with serious and favourable consideration. Further I did not think it wise to go at this stage, as not only are we not in possession of the revised views of our Allies, but I am also doubtful whether the War Cabinet has come to even provisional conclusions on the difficult matters touched upon in these conversations.

This finished the conversation in the afternoon.

In the evening we had another conversation, in which Mensdorff made repeated efforts to induce me to discuss general peace terms. I, however, firmly declined to do so, but allowed him to make several statements of great interest which I shall mention later. He seemed to have been under the impression that I was merely manœuvring in refusing to discuss general peace terms, and when finally he realised that he was wrong he seemed deeply disappointed. He exclaimed that in that case there was no peace in sight and that this horrible

*The evening
conversation :
no discussion
of general
peace terms*

War must go on. Europe, he said, was dying at the centre, America was becoming the financial and economic centre of the world, while Japan at the other end was gathering to herself immense power and resources and the whole trade of Asia. Why were we going on fighting? The British Prime Minister had said that we must have victory, Asquith had said that Prussian militarism must be crushed. If another year of this destruction had to pass the position of Europe and civilisation, already so pitiable, would indeed be beyond repair. What was the sort of victory we had in view? How would we know it and when would we consider it to be achieved? Did we want the Hohenzollerns to go? Surely, that was not likely to happen during the War, and would in any case not justify the practical destruction of European civilisation. Any political revolution in Germany would follow, not precede, the peace. Or did we intend the break-up of the German Army, or the occupation of Belgium? Surely that was no reasonable expectation either.

I explained to him how deeply impressed the British people were with the dangers to the future political system of Europe, if Germany survived as a sort of military dictator, and that we meant to continue the War until either victory had been achieved or the dark forces of revolution had done their work in Germany as they had already done in Russia. We were in a good position to go on. America was coming in with resources far greater and more real than any we had lost through the defection of Russia. France had suffered but little this year, and her Army had a very high morale and quite

*Britain
must break
German
militarism*

sufficient reserves for next year ; while our full resources in mechanical and man-power were only now being mobilised for the decisive phases of the War. I explained to him how the submarine and shipping situation had altered since last spring, and that we were now in a position, if necessary, to go on indefinitely as we had done during the Napoleonic Wars. The menace of Germany was no less grave than the menace of Napoleon, and was meeting with an even more determined temper on the part of the British people.

He replied that that would indeed be the end of Europe. Was it really worth while ? He again asked what this vague victory was for which all these immeasurable sacrifices had to be made. What was the definition of it, or what was the measure of proof of it ? Surely the German Army was not going to put up the white flag and openly abase itself and acknowledge defeat. It would continue the defence as brave men knew how to do. To his mind it was necessary to define clearly what we meant by victory. He would see only one test of our victory, and that was that we should define our aims closely, and place our terms before the enemy, and that the enemy should either accept or reject them. Otherwise the War would continue in misunderstanding, in darkness and fog, so to say. If the enemy accepted our terms we would have won ; if not, we could go on until he was forced to accept them. He pleaded for reasonable terms. He urged that the way should be prepared for their acceptance by Germany by means of preliminary conversations with Austria, in which the Germans were or were not to take part, according

*Mensdorff
pleads for
compromise
peace terms*

as we wished. He did not anticipate that the German attitude would be unreasonable. Belgium, he thought, would be evacuated, provided German economic and industrial interests, which before the War were very great in Belgium, were not injured or hampered. He did not believe there was any intention to annex any of the occupied parts of Russia. He could not say this for certain, but would be most surprised if the Germans made any such claim. About Alsace-Lorraine he knew that there were great difficulties, but incidentally he here asked the significant question, whether France wanted the whole of Alsace-Lorraine back. He continued that the Germans were very keen to get their colonies or some of them back, and he thought they would claim heavy compensation if we declined to return them. Above all, they would resist to the utmost a post-War economic war, as that would mean their practical boycott from the markets of the world. Such an economic war would be inconsistent with the new international system which we wished to promote after the War, and Austria, no less than Germany, would resist it to the utmost. He hoped that the objects which we had in view would be fair, reasonable and moderate; if they were, the time had come for their achievement, and for that purpose it would be highly desirable to clear up the situation by further discussions of an informal character, in which the Germans need not necessarily take a part to begin with.

I did not enter into a discussion of these general questions, and the Count went on to say with obvious sincerity that the two greatest peoples on earth, the two greatest peoples that had ever

existed, were the British and the Germans, that the future of the world depended on both of them and on their co-operation, that it was not in the interests of the world that either of them should be utterly defeated, even if that were possible, and that such a defeat would become the source of fresh calamities for the future of mankind. He hoped most earnestly that reason would prevail. I replied that it was only because of our solicitude for the future that we did not wish to leave the root of the evil to survive and to grow afresh in the future. It was not from any warlike spirit but because of our horror of war that we were prepared to endure its evils longer for the present in order to end them for the future—to which he retorted, in lighter vein, that the Entente did certainly seem more warlike at present than the Central Powers.

This brought our conversations to an end, and we said good-bye to each other.

The following morning, 19th December, the Count, who had ascertained that I was stopping another day in Geneva, sent a message to ask whether he could have another interview with me. I therefore saw him again in the afternoon of the same day, and he said to me that he was anxious that both of us should be clear on certain points. In the first place, Austria would be prepared to go any length with us in pressing on Germany a policy of disarmament, including the submarine and similar developments, and the policy of conferences and arbitration against war in future. In the second place he was profoundly thankful

*German-British
co-operation
vital for
World peace*

*A further
interview*

for the sympathy which I had expressed for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and when in future they took a line of their own independent of Germany they would count on our support. In the third place he trusted that at the peace we would use our influence with our friends to moderate their demands, and in that case Austria would do her best to meet us fairly.

In reply I repeated some of the views already expressed in the preceding conversations. I added that Austria had now a great opportunity to show the highest statesmanship and thereby to help the world towards an early, satisfactory and lasting settlement. She would have to free herself from German influence and make a fresh independent start of her own. She would also have to give up some small things in order to realise the greater destiny that might be in store for her. He replied that it was very hard to give away after the shocking behaviour especially of Roumania and Italy, but Austria would be prepared to meet us reasonably if we stood by her and made no unfair claims.

I soon saw, however, that something else was really on his mind. He then came out with it.

*Austria
anxious to
mediate
peace* He said that the War must be ended, and that it was the fervent ambition of Austria to be the instrument for bringing this about. ~~A~~separate peace would be impossible, but Austria, whose sympathies were really with Great Britain, wished in future to work with her. Austria could stand between the great enemies and help towards peace if use was made of her. She was ready and anxious to do anything. Especially must we not separate now that conversa-

tions had started. He hoped we would meet again to pursue our discussions, if possible into greater details. Next time, or the time after next, he felt sure that Count Czernin would come to the discussion if we wanted one who could speak with more authority. He hoped it would be possible in such a case to fix a meeting-place nearer the Austrian frontier. If we did not wish to speak to the Germans the discussions might again be confined to the Austrian aspect of peace. If again we wished to have a more general discussion but still not with the Germans, we could make use of Czernin, who was in sympathy with British ideals and could usefully smooth away preliminary difficulties with the Germans.

He hoped that the agencies which we had used to get into touch on this occasion would be used again for the same purpose, and that we would meet again soon. He returned once more to the subject of victory and *said it was misleading to talk of victory, for while the Germans had been successful in Central Europe, the British Empire had gained far more lasting and far-reaching victories over the whole world, and was now in complete control of everything outside Central Europe.* The victory was already ours in a very important sense, and it was useless to continue to shed the blood of tens and hundreds of thousands of the youth of Europe for a greater measure of military success, which might or might not be achieved in future.

I repeated to him what I had previously said, that I did not think we were prepared to talk to Germany, but we appreciated his suggestion to keep the present conversations on foot, and would bear in mind what he had said about Czernin. If,

on their part, the Austrians wished to speak to us again, the same channels would avail unless secrecy demanded resort to other channels.

We then parted.

In conclusion I wish to say that I have not the least doubt that the line we have taken with Austria on this occasion will prove most useful and fruitful. It evidently made a deep impression on Count Mensdorff. From the very depths of her abasement and despair, Austria has been made to see daylight, and I expect that she will strain every nerve to induce Germany to accept moderate terms, and that she will thereafter strive, with our assistance, to recover and assert her political independence of Germany. Whether the vision of a truly liberal Austria will really appeal to her statesmen, the future alone will show.

In all these conversations I deliberately refrained from a word of reference to Turkey."

It will be observed that at that date we did not contemplate a complete break-up of the Austrian Empire, but rather that within its bounds there should be set up a number of free autonomous and practically independent States on the model of the British Empire. There are a few outstanding inferences to be drawn from this remarkable document :—

*Inferences
from Smuts's
report*

1. At that date the negotiation of a separate peace with Austria was out of the question. Mensdorff, representing as he did the Austrian Prime Minister's views, would regard such a peace as dishonouring to the Empire. That was in itself

conclusive as to the impracticability of further negotiation. Even had we agreed to a general Conference, France would treat it as an abandonment and a betrayal.

2. No concessions were to be made to Italy and Roumania. Their entry into the War on the side of the Allies was regarded as an act of unutterable treachery. In fact, Mensdorff said that if Austria were to make a separate peace with the Allies she would be "as base as Italy." There was the additional objection to conceding any territory to either Italy or Roumania, that at that moment they were both in the position of beaten foes. We could not take that view without betraying Italy, who was still fighting on our side.

3. Germany was, in the estimation of Mensdorff, militarily triumphant. He evidently believed she could not be beaten. The worst that could befall her would be a stalemate. She could not, therefore, contemplate a peace based on the assumption that she was already defeated or was likely to be beaten in the end.

The Cabinet considered this report a complete justification of their view that the time had not yet arrived for a general Peace Conference in which Germany would be included.

On the other hand, Mensdorff made a fruitful suggestion which we felt might be acted upon without delay. He urged us to state our peace

*Need to
state Allied
peace aims*

terms in a way which would be so clear and definite that our enemies could not fail to understand what were our aims.

If they felt they were reasonable they would be accepted. On the other hand, if they did not

form a basis for discussion they would be rejected. We would all then know exactly where we stood.

A similar suggestion came from Dr. Parodi, an agent of the opposition party in Turkey, who had come to Switzerland with the intention of establishing contact with the Allies, and *Turkish approaches* was interviewed there by Mr. Kerr. He admitted that for the time being the Germanophile section of the Committee of Union and Progress which governed Turkey was uppermost, but he thought that the proclamation of moderate terms might reverse the proportions. Enver Pasha, the strongest man in the Government, was a pure militarist Germanophile, and was still confident that Germany would win the War. His principal colleague, Talaat Pasha, thought Germany would be neither victorious nor beaten and that there would be a *paix blanche* more or less on the basis of the *status quo*. Philip Kerr's informant thought that if we made it clear that one of our objects was to establish Arab autonomy it would hearten the Arabs and further the antagonism which existed between the Arab and Turkish officers.

Mr. Kerr's interview with Dr. Parodi was not satisfactory. Parodi did not profess to represent the Turkish Government and it was clear from this conversation that the governing party in the Turkish Empire was not yet ready to enter into any negotiations with the Allies on any terms which we could entertain—or even discover. Mr. Kerr's Report is given in full in Appendix I to this Chapter.

The net result of this visit to Switzerland was to leave the impression that a separate peace with Austria and Turkey was not attainable just yet,

but that the time had arrived when it was desirable that the Government should re-state the terms upon which it was prepared to make peace.

There was another reason why a re-statement of our war aims was necessary at this juncture. We were coming to the last, and in so many ways the most critical stage of the War. *An answer necessary to pacifist propaganda* There was a great deal of pacifist propaganda at home which, operating on a natural weariness, might develop into a dangerous anti-war sentiment that would undermine the morale of the nation at a time when the event depended on the staying power of the nations. All the belligerent nations were confronted with this situation. In Germany, Austria and Russia the Peace sentiment was fostered amongst the population by hardship and privation and even actual hunger. It was one of the reasons why I attached so much importance to the question of maintaining our food supplies. The desire for peace was spreading amongst men and women who, although they were convinced of the righteousness of the War, felt that the time had come for putting an end to its horrors in the name of humanity, if it could be done on any terms that were honourable and safe. Lord Lansdowne constituted himself the spokesman of this sentiment. He represented a powerful and growing section of the people not only in social, but also in industrial circles. The suffering was not confined to one class. All classes alike shared the tortures of sorrow for the fallen, and the anxieties of incessant apprehension for those who were in the zone of death. Amongst the workmen there was an unrest that was disturbing and might at any moment become dangerous. The efforts we were making to comb out more men for

the Army were meeting with resistance amongst the Trade Unions, whose loyalty and patriotism had throughout been above reproach. I attached great importance to retaining their continued support in the prosecution of the War. Had they been driven into hostility, a dangerous rift in the home front would have been inevitable. Germany was to find out how fatal to success was the alienation of organised labour. The influence of the MacDonald section of the Labour movement was becoming greater, and their agitation was intensifying and gaining fresh adherents. One of their number informed me that he never attended more packed and enthusiastic meetings than those which he addressed on peace during the last year or two of the War. It was essential to convince the nation that we were not continuing the War merely to gain a vindictive or looting triumph, but that we had definite peace aims and that these were both just and attainable.

The difficulties with our man-power had almost produced a deadlock with the Trade Unions.

Trade Union problems Without their goodwill and co-operation, we could not have secured further recruits from amongst the exempted—certainly not without a resistance which might have alienated organised labour throughout the land. It therefore became necessary to open negotiations with them. I decided, first of all, to invite the Trade Unions to a Conference on the subject of our war aims. In order to ensure their co-operation it was necessary to place before them with complete frankness the purpose with which we were prosecuting the War. The Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress and of the Labour Party

had already formulated their peace proposals on 16th December. They did not differ in any material respect from those which we were putting forward. That rendered my task very much easier, for there had been mischievous statements circulated in the Press and at meetings and in private that our aims were of an "imperialistic" and predatory character, and that we were only continuing the cruelties and sufferings of war in order to secure these nefarious objects.

I therefore had a detailed and a careful statement prepared of our peace objectives. They were considered in the greatest detail by the Cabinet and approved by them. As I had been informed by an eminent American, who was in touch with the Asquith section of the Liberals, that they thought "opinion in favour of continuing the War was weakening in this country," I thought it desirable to secure their assent to the peace proposals we intended to put forward, so that the peace terms we proclaimed should be national in the true sense of the word. I arranged a private meeting with Mr. Asquith and Sir Edward Grey to discuss our peace declaration.

We met at breakfast at Mr. Asquith's house. I read to them the document which I had prepared.

I had already obtained the Cabinet assent to its terms. With some slight alterations, entirely in the wording, they approved its terms. The suggested amendments were duly incorporated. The Cabinet took the necessary steps to inform the Dominions of the nature of the statement I proposed to make. Their approval was secured before we committed ourselves.

*I prepare
an agreed
statement of
peace aims*

*Asquith
and Grey
approve*

The Conference with the Trade Unions took place at the Caxton Hall on the 5th January. It was a crowded gathering of delegates and thoroughly representative. I gave to them in full the declaration of our war aims.

*Caxton Hall
Conference*

Although no resolution was passed, at the end of the meeting there was every indication of a general acceptance by the delegates of the proposals submitted to them. Inasmuch as the terms of peace outlined on this occasion represented not merely the views of Ministers and their supporters, but of Labour, the Independent Liberals and the Dominions, and were subsequently embodied in the Treaty of Versailles, the statement I made to the Trade Unions is an essential part of my narrative of the War. I accordingly include the full text of my speech in Appendix II to this Chapter. As will be seen by a reference to it, I made it clear that our one object in the War was to defend the violated public law of Europe, to vindicate Treaty obligations and to secure the restoration of Belgium. We intended to stand by French democracy in its demand for the restitution of its lost provinces and to secure national freedom for those parts of the Austrian Empire which were at present held in unwilling bondage to an alien race. As to the ultimate peace settlement, I concluded my speech by saying :—

*My statement
of war aims*

“ . . . whatever settlement is made will be suitable only to the circumstances under which it is made, and, as those circumstances change, changes in the settlement will be called for.

So long as the possibility of dispute between nations continues, that is to say, so long as men and

women are dominated by passionate ambition, and war is the only means of settling a dispute, all nations must live under the burden not only of having from time to time to engage in it, but of being compelled to prepare for its possible outbreak. The crushing weight of modern armaments, the increasing evil of compulsory military service, the vast waste of wealth and effort involved in war-like preparation, these are blots on our civilisation of which every thinking individual must be ashamed.

For these and other similar reasons, we are confident that a great attempt must be made to establish by some international organisation an alternative to war as a means of settling international disputes. After all, war is a relic of barbarism, and just as law has succeeded violence as the means of settling disputes between individuals, so we believe that it is destined ultimately to take the place of war in the settlement of controversies between nations.

If, then, we are asked what are we fighting for, we reply, as we have often replied—we are fighting for a just and lasting peace—and we believe that before permanent peace can be hoped for three conditions must be fulfilled.

First, the sanctity of treaties must be re-established; secondly, a territorial settlement must be secured based on the right of self-determination or the consent of the governed; and, lastly, we must seek by the creation of some international organisation to limit the burden of armaments and diminish the probability of war.

On those conditions the British Empire would welcome peace; to secure those conditions its

peoples are prepared to make even greater sacrifices than those they have yet endured."

Prince Max of Baden in referring to my speech in his Memoirs says :—

*British
opinion
united*

"Immediately after this speech, the rift in the British home front closed."

Henceforth, those who were seeking disunion for political or personal motives were forced into another tack in which Labour had no interest.

Shortly after the meeting I received the following letter from Mr. Clynes, who was Minister of Food at that time :—

"Dear Prime Minister,

I have had the opportunity within the past few days while on work for the above Ministry of meeting representative men in Conferences and in other ways, and I would like to send you this line to say what a splendid effect your speech to the Labour Delegates has had on the minds of men who were getting rather unsettled because of the length of the War and the effects of a form of propaganda which has been freely continued.

*Clynes's
letter*

Most of what was said of course was not new, but the occasion and the form of the speech have been of the greatest value."

Yours faithfully,

J. R. CLYNES."

A few days later, President Wilson gave utterance to his famous Fourteen Points. This declaration,

which subsequently played such an important part, at the Armistice and the Peace Conference, was not regarded by any of the Allies as being at variance on vital matters, except in respect of Freedom of the Seas, with their own declarations—although we never formally accepted them, and they constituted no part of the official policy of the Alliance.

In an allusion to my speech President Wilson said :—

“ Within the last week Mr. Lloyd George has spoken with admirable candour and in admirable spirit for the people and government of Great Britain.”

M. Pichon also made a declaration on behalf of France which corresponded with that of the British Government.

Meanwhile, the Germans felt that it was essential that some response should be made by them to the peace declarations of Allied statesmen. They knew that not only the world but their own people were waiting for their answer.

The prolongation of the War or its end depended not on the voice of Austria, but of her powerful ally, Germany. Long communications on the subject passed between the Kaiser, Hindenburg, Ludendorff and the German Chancellor. These messages or their purport were not of course known to the Allies at that time, but they have since seen the light, and as an indication of the German attitude towards peace at the beginning of 1918, the letter written by Hindenburg to the Kaiser on the 7th January is significant. The underlining of passages

was made by the Kaiser at the time and indicates his attitude.

“ General Headquarters,
7th January, 1918.

Your Majesty,
has been pleased to command that General Ludendorff and I should take a responsible part in the peace negotiations. Your Majesty, in doing so, made it our right and duty to see to it that the result of the peace corresponds to the sacrifices and achievements of the German people and army, and that the peace strengthens us materially and brings us such strong frontiers, that our opponents will not be so ready to venture to let loose a fresh war.

In all discussions under the presidency of Your Majesty and with the Chancellor we have pointed to the importance of protected frontiers as a vital question for Germany. It is doubtful whether such frontiers will be obtained, and this troubles me considerably.”

Then follow lengthy complaints of the way the Army Staff's views regarding Austria, Lithuania and Poland had been overlooked. He was especially angry about the cession of Poland to Austria. He points to the criticism of the Army outside and adds the ominous sentence which is underlined by the Kaiser :
“ I cannot suppress the fear that the manner in which the negotiations were conducted and the result in Brest will unfavourably influence the temper of the Army.”

But the most significant paragraph of all is the following :—

“ The latter is now being put to a great test. In order to secure for ourselves the political and economic world position, which we need, we must beat the Western Powers. For this reason Your Majesty ordered the attack in the West. This involves by far the greatest effort we have made during the whole war ; the greatest sacrifices will be asked for. After the incidents at Brest I doubt whether at the conclusion of peace we shall obtain the rewards which our predominance demands and which are *worthy of our sacrifices*. The *unavoidable effect* would be a *terrible disappointment* for the home-coming army and for the nation which would have to bear prohibitive taxes. . . .

I am definitely convinced that the policy advocated by us leads to a strengthening of the monarchy and an extended predominance of Germany, whilst the opposite policy can only bring Germany down from the height to which Your Majesty and the ancestors of Your All-Highest led her.”

On the publication of the speeches of President Wilson and myself, Count Hertling, the German Imperial Chancellor, and Count Czernin were charged with the enemy replies. On 24th January, Count Hertling spoke in the Reichstag and, after referring to the Brest-Litovsk negotiations proceeded :—

“ Two announcements have, as we all know, been made in the meantime by enemy statesmen—the

speech by the English Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, of 5th January, and the message of President Wilson of the day after. I freely admit that Mr. Lloyd George has changed his tone. He no longer uses abuse, and thus appears to wish to establish again his claim to negotiating abilities, of which I had previously despaired. All the same I cannot go so far as the many opinions from neutral countries which claim to read in the speech of Mr. Lloyd George a sincere desire for peace, and even a friendly spirit. It is true that he declares that he does not wish to destroy Germany, and that he has never wanted to destroy her. He even finds expressions of respect for our economic, political and cultural position, but amongst them there is no lack of other utterances, and between the lines there is always present that it is his duty to sit in judgment on guilty Germany for all sorts of crimes.

This is the spirit, gentlemen, with which naturally we can have nothing to do, and in which as yet we can observe no trace of a sincere desire for peace. We are supposed to be culprits over whom the Entente is now sitting in judgment."

He then entered into an elaborate defence of Germany's action in waging war and holding on to Alsace-Lorraine. His announcement that Germany would not part with it was received in the Reichstag with "Loud Cheers." He then made a very significant and sinister allusion to German designs on the invaded provinces of France.

"The occupied parts of France are a valuable

pawn in our hands. Here also forcible annexation forms no part of the official German policy.

No *The conditions and mode of the evacuation,*
surrender which must take into consideration
of Alsace- the vital interests of Germany, must
Lorraine be agreed between Germany and France. I can only once again expressly emphasise that there can never be any question of the separation of the Imperial Provinces. We will never permit ourselves to be robbed of Alsace-Lorraine by our enemies under the pretext of any fine phrases—of Alsace-Lorraine, which in the meantime, has become more and more closely allied internally with German life, which is developing more and more economically in a highly satisfactory manner, and where more than 87 per cent. of the people speak the German mother tongue. (Loud cheers.)”

Not much hope there. Even the provinces of France occupied in this war were only to be returned “on conditions.”

As to Russia and Poland, we were brusquely told to mind our own business :—

“The Entente States having refused to join in the negotiations within the period agreed upon by Russia and the four Allied Powers, I
Germany's must decline, in the name of the latter,
free hand any subsequent interference. The
in Russia question here involved is one which alone concerns Russia and the four Allied Powers.

It was not the Entente—who found nothing but meaningless words for Poland and before the War never mediated on her behalf with Russia—but the German Empire and Austria-Hungary

who freed Poland from the Tsaristic régime which was oppressing her national individuality. Therefore, it must be left to Germany and Austria-Hungary and Poland to come to an agreement about the future organisation of that country. We are, as has been proved by the negotiations and declarations of the last year, well under way with the task."

But his treatment of Belgium was a final blow to any hope of peace :—

"As far as the Belgian question is concerned it has been declared repeatedly by my predecessors in office that at no time during the War has the forcible annexation of Belgium by the German Empire formed a point in the programme of German politics. The Belgian question belongs to a complicity of questions, the details of which will have to be regulated during the peace negotiations. As long as our enemies unreservedly adopt the attitude that the integrity of the territory of the Allies offers the only possible foundation for peace negotiations, I must adhere to the standpoint which, up to the present, has always been taken, and must decline any discussion of the Belgian question until the general discussion takes place."

Italian claims he treated as a question entirely for Austria. We shall see later on what Austria had to say about them. The fate of Arabs in Mesopotamia and Arabs and Jews in Palestine was a matter entirely for the Turks. The Turks said nothing on the subject.

It is evident both from Hindenburg's letter and Hertling's speech that the Germans were in no mind to discuss any tolerable peace. They were full of the assurance of victory. Hertling's real attitude is revealed towards the end of his speech :—

*Germany in
no mood to
make peace*

“ May they believe me when I state that our military situation was never so favourable as it is now. Our highly gifted Army Leaders face the future with undiminished confidence in victory. Throughout the whole army, in the officers, and in the men, lives the unbroken joy of battle.”

The Supreme War Council held at Versailles on the 2nd February reviewed the whole of these Peace Declarations. As a result of the discussion it was decided to issue a joint declaration embodying the results of the session of the Council. This was published in the Press of the Allied countries on 4th February and included the following paragraph :—

*Declaration
of Supreme
War Council*

“ The Supreme War Council gave the most careful consideration to the recent utterances of the German Chancellor and of the Austro-Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs, but was unable to find in them any real approximation to the moderate conditions laid down by all the Allied Governments. This conviction was only deepened by the impression made by the contrast between the professed idealistic aims with which the Central Powers entered upon the present negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, and the now openly disclosed plans of conquest and spoliation. Under

the circumstances, the Supreme War Council decided that the only immediate task before them lay in the prosecution with the utmost vigour, and in the closest and most effective co-operation, of the military efforts of the Allies, until such time as the pressure of that effort shall have brought about in the enemy Governments and peoples a change of temper which would justify the hope of the conclusion of peace on terms which would not involve the abandonment, in face of an aggressive and unrepentant militarism, of all the principles of freedom, justice and the respect for the Law of Nations which the Allies are resolved to vindicate."

But if the statement of our peace aims set out in my speech of 5th January had brought forth no favourable public response from the Central Powers, one of their most important Ministers—Count Czernin, the Austrian Foreign Minister—secretly harboured and expressed more kindly thoughts of our proposals. Very soon after the delivery of my speech there was a renewal of the approaches to us from Austria.

Our Minister at Berne received a message that Count Czernin wished to meet me in Switzerland.

The Minister had indirectly received a *Fresh approach by Austria* communication from a highly-placed Austrian who had paid a visit to Switzerland in order to convey the message to Sir Horace Rumbold. This Austrian official's diagnosis of the position has an interest of its own. It was set out in a telegram from Sir Horace Rumbold, dated 11th January, 1918, of which the following is a paraphrase :—

" M. de Skrzynski yesterday visited Geneva for an interview with Dr. Parodi. According to his

statement, there were in the addresses recently delivered by Mr. Lloyd George and by President Wilson a number of points about which there was agreement between the Government of His Majesty and that of Austria-Hungary. There were various other matters in addition referred to, apart from these points, where it seemed that further discussion might well lead to a satisfactory understanding. The comments of a section of the Vienna Press upon the views of Mr. Lloyd George must not be taken by H.M. Government as representative of the views of Count Czernin or of the mass of the people. A part of the Press of Austria-Hungary, and nearly all the Press of Germany is controlled by munitions manufacturers, and these raise an outcry the moment they observe a glint of peace beginning to dawn. Count Czernin, so M. de Skrzynski proceeded to say, has been compelled to maintain a titanic struggle at Berlin in order to secure the adoption of his "no annexations" formula. Count Hertling, on the day when a declaration to this effect was made by Kuhlmann, had hardly dared to leave his dwelling, fearing that the mob in the Berlin streets would hiss him.

A section of the German public is utterly fanatical in supporting militaristic projects of annexation, but there is also a powerful body of Pacifist opinion, which is bound to exert considerable influence.

As a price for securing the adherence of Germany to his formula, Count Czernin was compelled to agree to dispatch certain Austro-Hungarian regiments to the Western Front in order to display the solidarity of Austria with Germany. The military aid thus promised was two or three regiments, and

these are already in Belgium or about to proceed thither. It is suggested as desirable by M. de Skrzynski that in commenting upon this the Entente Press should not attach much importance to the military assistance thus rendered, since Germany is really getting it as a sort of blackmail. As regards Turkey, the Austro-Hungarian Government thinks that a formula might be devised which would assure a considerable degree of autonomy to Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine without ostensibly depriving Turkey of any territory. In any event M. de Skrzynski stated that if Mr. Lloyd George was willing to have an interview with Count Czernin, the latter would come to Switzerland to meet him."

The Cabinet was doubtful as to the wisdom of my accepting the invitation. A meeting of two Prime Ministers from the opposing Powers to discuss Peace was necessarily a more formal occasion and would attract much more attention than private conversations between a Minister and an ex-Ambassador. Besides, Czernin had not answered the question put to Mensdorff as to whether Austria was prepared to negotiate a separate peace. Personally I was strongly in favour of keeping up these communications with Austria. If they came to anything we should have one foe the less to fight. If they did not, even then it would have the effect of making the Austrians less inclined to antagonise the Western Powers by sending troops to fight them in France. So I urged the Cabinet that we should take advantage of every overture which might lead to a separate peace with Austria, and might reduce the Austrian Army to the

*Views of
War Cabinet*

same state of impotent inactivity as the Russian Army had been in during 1917.

It was decided that the opportunity for any serious request for peace *pourparlers* ought not to be ignored, and it was resolved to send a member of the War Cabinet to meet Count Czernin.

*Interchange
of messages*

Messages passed to and fro for weeks, but no meeting could be arranged until late in February. The negotiations made no headway. Czernin was tricky, and our Foreign Office very sticky. The reluctance of the latter to press matters to a conclusion was due to their suspicions of the genuineness of Czernin. They thought he was playing a deep game for Germany. It was clear that he was deceiving one side or the other. If his messages to us were sincere then he was deceiving Germany. If his speeches represented his real intentions then he was playing with us. The truth of the matter probably was that the Austrian Government were pulled in both directions and that they were thoroughly distracted. On the one hand, there was the dread of approaching doom from which they wanted to escape ; on the other hand, was the fear of a powerful Germany which enchained them with infrangible steel. It was finally agreed that General Smuts should once more go on his errand of peace and proceed to Switzerland to ascertain the exact meaning and scope of these overtures, whether Count Czernin was actually behind them and, if so, the general line of his proposals.

General Smuts again took with him Mr. Philip Kerr, and they reached Berne on 9th March. At first it appeared as if there had been a complete change in the Austrian attitude and that at last they were prepared to confine the discussions strictly to the

problems of an Austro-Hungarian peace. It seemed as if this time the Austrians meant to get out of the War with or without their allies.

*Smuts and
Kerr meet
Skrzynski* They were convinced that the War was being prolonged owing to Prussian annexationist ambitions, and they were prepared, once they had negotiated a separate peace, to leave the orbit of Prussian influence, and remodel their institutions on federal lines. Mr. Kerr, being of a naturally hopeful disposition, and being also young and therefore with his belief in human nature not yet vitiated by experience, at first took a sanguine view of the proposals and in a telegram to me from Berne on the situation, said :—

“ . . . I think that, subject to what Skrzynski may say, very great results might follow from a conversation between Czernin and a British negotiator as to a possible settlement between Austria-Hungary and the Entente, provided that it were absolutely clear that we were not prepared to discuss terms with Germany at all. It is possible that it might end in the three Southern Allies of Germany coming out together. Nor do I see any real danger can follow unless discussion leads to discord with our own Allies, or unless it fails because an agreement cannot be reached because our terms are unreasonable. In latter event Czernin would go back and re-unite his people on the ground that Entente were impossibly greedy. It therefore seems to me essential that if the Czernin meeting is to take place we should discuss basis of a separate Austro-Hungarian peace with our Allies including Serbia as soon as possible because if anything is to come of a meeting with Czernin he ought to be in

a position to reach a preliminary understanding on the spot if he himself is reasonable. . . ."

General Smuts was instructed that he could go ahead on these lines. He had a long conversation with M. de Skrzynski in the course of which the Austrian emissary expressed the fear on Czernin's part that the Entente were simply endeavouring to detach Austria-Hungary in order to isolate and defeat Germany. General Smuts assured him that what the Entente were after was a settlement on terms which would bring about a just and lasting peace everywhere, with a prospect of general disarmament. He added that unfortunately the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and with Roumania were not, in the eyes of the Entente, in keeping with these principles.

The position at which the exchange of views was left on 14th March, 1918, was that if any conversation was to take place it would be for the purpose of arriving at a settlement of all questions outstanding between Austria-Hungary and the Allies, the *principle of settlement being not the bargaining of territory against territory but that justice must be done to all peoples*. On no other basis was it possible to construct a lasting peace. It was understood that the meetings would proceed to discuss the practical application of this agreed principle to the matters in dispute between Italy, Serbia, Roumania and Austria-Hungary, and that inasmuch as certain internal racial questions vitally affected international relations and therefore the possibility of lasting peace, these questions could not be excluded from discussion. It was also clearly understood that the Allied Governments would refuse to be drawn into a discussion of peace terms with Germany.

General Smuts, however, drew one other inference from his meeting with Skrzynski, that between the time when the meeting was first suggested and his actual arrival in Switzerland, a change had once more taken place in the attitude of Count Czernin, and that his eagerness for *pourparlers* with the Entente had diminished in that space of time. This is explained in the conclusions which were set out after the interview in a memorandum by Mr. Kerr :—

*Austrians
cooling off*

“ . . . In the first place it may be due to the effect of the collapse of Russia before the German advance, coupled with the improved military situation of Germany in the West. Count Czernin may have decided that his best policy was to abandon separate negotiations and see what terms military necessity or a new peace offensive against the civilian populations of the Allies might force us to give him. In the second place the change of attitude may be explained by the opening of the negotiations with America. Czernin may have made up his mind that it would be easier to do business via America because the U.S.A. was not tied to Italy by Treaty, and would therefore be more likely to stand out for moderate terms, and also because the U.S.A. was the Power from which Austria-Hungary could probably get most financial assistance. In the third place, Count Czernin may have begun to realise that once he entered into a conversation with a British plenipotentiary he would be unable to draw back owing to the pressure in favour of peace from popular opinion inside the monarchy, and that once begun the negotiations would inevitably lead on either to a separate peace

or to the break-up of the monarchy owing to internal divisions in regard to peace. If so, especially in view of the extreme obscurity of the political situation of the moment, and possibility of a growing realisation of the difficulties which confronted him as he got near the brink of negotiation, Count Czernin may have been merely concerned to gain time, and to avoid committing himself to a meeting which was bound to have fateful consequences. On this hypothesis which is consistent with M. de Skrzynski's explanation of the change in Count Czernin's attitude, my arrival must have put him in great difficulties. He had indeed no alternative but to temporise."

The proximity of the March offensive, and no doubt the confidence expressed by the German Staff in its success had damped the Austrian ardour for peace. In this temper no business was possible, and when in a few days the great attack was made and prospered, all question of the continuation of peace conversations was ruled out. All that came of these *pourparlers* was the hesitancy of Austria to throw her army into the deadly struggle in the west. It may be of some interest, not untinged with regret, to conjecture what might have been the effect on the settlement of Europe if peace had been concluded with Austria in the spring of 1918. The Austrian Empire would have remained ; instead of breaking up into a number of independent States, not always friendly to the Central authority, there would have been perhaps half a dozen autonomous dominions all owing allegiance to the Austrian Crown and working harmoniously together for their common interests.

*Hopes of
German
offensive*

As for Germany, we received no direct or indirect intimation of her desire for peace except on terms that were not even debatable. The Germans meant to fight it out unless they got terms that would leave them better off territorially and economically at the end of the War than they were at the beginning. The militarists dare not march back to Berlin after signing a peace which was an admission that they were beaten. It was their war and they meant to end it with banners flying. They meant to try one big gamble for such a victory as would enable them to ensure their own terms. Ludendorff urged the politicians at home to support the offensive of his army by an elaborate peace offensive that would undermine the morale of the English nation and make it less eager to put all its strength into the fight. He complained that these politicians were not helping him as they ought to do by a peace propaganda that would weaken and divide the enemy peoples. That was his sole motive for our peace talk.

*No peace
moves from
Germany*

APPENDIX I

REPORT OF MR. PHILIP KERR'S INTERVIEW
WITH DR. PARODI, HEAD OF THE MISSION
SCOLAIRE EGYPTIENNE, ON DECEMBER 18TH,
1917

(a) PREFATORY NOTE BY GENERAL SMUTS

THE Prime Minister asked me before leaving London to look into the Turkish position so far as material was available in Switzerland. Dr. Parodi of Geneva had had several conversations with members of the Turkish Red Cross Mission now in Switzerland and had gathered very interesting information in regard to divergent views in the Committee of Union and Progress. He had also had numerous conversations with many other Turks recently. As I was very busy with the Mensdorff conversations I asked Mr. Philip Kerr, who accompanied me from London, to go into the whole matter with Dr. Parodi, and Mr. Kerr has prepared a note summarising Dr. Parodi's information and views hereto annexed (a) which discloses the line of cleavage in the C.U.P. and suggests a line of diplomatic action for us in order to get Turkey out of the War.

I also sent Mr. Kerr to Berne to discuss the whole matter with Sir Horace Rumbold, as I could not myself go there without grave risk of my presence in Switzerland being detected. Mr. Kerr discussed the matter with Sir Horace Rumbold and thereafter

again with me, and in consequence a memorandum has been drafted annexed (b) of which a copy has been left with Sir Horace Rumbold and in which a line of action is suggested for our endeavours to induce the Turks to make a separate peace. If the War Cabinet approves of this document a telegram sent to Sir Horace Rumbold will enable him to set the whole business going without further delay. Or in the alternative, action may be taken on the document with such modifications as the Cabinet may consider advisable. The whole matter has been carefully discussed with Dr. Parodi who strikes me as a man of considerable ability and discretion, and I have no doubt that he will prove very useful to Sir Horace Rumbold in the preliminary and informal stages of the business. Sir Horace Rumbold awaits Foreign Office instructions in order to take action. Action should not be delayed as Mouktar Bey, who is at the head of the Turkish Red Cross Mission now in Switzerland, is expected to return to Turkey at the end of the year. He is said to be a friend of Talaat's with leanings towards a settlement with the Entente and may be a useful man with whom to have a preliminary informal conversation.

20th December, 1917.

J. C. S.

(b) MR. PHILIP KERR'S REPORT

Dr. Parodi says that the Committee of Union and Progress is divided into two parts—the larger and the Germanophile, the smaller more disposed towards the Entente and especially Great Britain. The most active leader of the Germanophile section is Enver Pasha. Enver is a pure militarist Germanophile, having no ideas for the future save that Ger-

many will win the War and recover the Turkish Empire, of which he then will be Dictator or Sultan. Talaat also belongs to this section, but is now in an uncertain frame of mind and ready to go with the winning side. He thinks that Germany will neither be victorious nor beaten and that there will be a *paix blanche* more or less on the basis of the *status quo*. On this assumption there is no sufficient reason why Turkey should break with Germany. He listens to what the smaller section of the Committee—the Ententophile—says, does not oppose them but does not act on their opinion.

Turkey is in a very bad way economically but except for the Committee of Union and Progress, there is nobody capable of taking the initiative at all. The opposition in Europe is powerless because it has no connections or friends inside Turkey. Any movement must, therefore, come from the opposition within the Committee itself. There is no other organised force in Turkey save the Committee, and its force rests on the officers of the Army.

The views of the opposition within the Committee are something as follows: They are getting more and more afraid of Turkey becoming a German province, and are more and more embittered by the arrogant manners and despotic methods of the Germans. To save Turkey from falling completely under German control, they would like to cut free from Germany and lean on England, which they say has always been a friend to Turkey, if they could get moderate terms. The greatest obstacle in their way is the fact that the Germanophile section is able to point out persistently that whereas Germany is pledged to the restoration of the Turkish Empire, the Entente is committed to dismembering it. A

number of well-known Turks, e.g., Djemal Pasha, surgeon of the Sultan, Lufti Bey Fikri, député d'Adana, Kamal Bey, and others have all within the last month or two told Dr. Parodi that while they dislike intensely the German connection and can hardly endure to live in Turkey because of it, and that while they greatly fear for the future of Turkey under German control, and are entirely sympathetic to the Entente and especially Great Britain, it is useless and impossible for them to oppose the existing régime because they have no answer to the Germanophile propaganda that whereas the Germans are pledged to recover the Empire, the Allies are pledged to destroy it.

According to Dr. Parodi the Ententophile section is prepared to consider a settlement on something like the following lines :—

(a) ARABIA. That Turkey should acknowledge the complete political independence of the Kingdom of Hedjaz and of the rest of Arabia. The Ententophile section of the Committee recognise that they have failed to govern Arabia properly, and that even if it were possible for them to keep it, it would prove an intolerably burdensome and expensive possession. They are willing, therefore, to concede its complete independence. It could be formed either into the Kingdom of Hedjaz, and a number of independent Sheikdoms, or the latter could be federated. As to the Caliphate the Party is divided. Some would let the King of the Hedjaz have it, others want it for the Sultan. The division apparently follows the line of cleavage between the Pan-Turanian and the Pan-Islamic schools. They would want tribute, however, from

Arabia in order to enable the Turkish treasury to make both ends meet.

(b) SYRIA, MESOPOTAMIA, PALESTINE. The Ententophile section of the Committee would be prepared to see these established as autonomous provinces either as separate entities or federated together under the Turkish flag. The autonomy to be real ; either a form of Government chosen by the people themselves, or a system of Administration, through European advisers, as in Egypt before the War. The flag, however, must be preserved as the symbol of the unity of the Turkish Empire, and a tribute to be paid to the Ottoman Treasury as in the case of Hedjaz.

(c) ARMENIA. The Ententophile section of the Committee recognise the utter failure of the Turkish Government in Armenia, are ashamed of its record of assassination and atrocity and are willing to leave the fate of Armenia to be entirely decided by the European Powers. In order to facilitate this they are willing to transfer the Kurds from Armenian villayets into a separate Kurdish villayet.

(d) CONSTANTINOPLE. As to Constantinople it must remain Turk. On this they lay the utmost stress, and it would have the most enormous moral effect in Turkey if it became known that the Allies would be willing that Constantinople should remain Turkish. The Allied declarations which still hold the field are those of Miliukoff. These have never yet been amended. They also wish for a strategic rectification of their frontier towards Bulgaria. They are extremely bitter about the part they surrendered to Bulgaria as the price of getting her into the War and fiercely demand it

back. As to the Straits, Bosphorus and Dardanelles, they would agree that they should be neutralised—a special International Commission to be appointed to control the waterway, quays, etc. They would dismantle the forts and make no new ones within a certain radius.

In order to enable the opposition to make any headway it is essential, according to Dr. Parodi, that the Allies should let the C.U.P. (the whole Committee including Talaat and Enver and not merely the opposition) know the Allied views in regard to Turkey. If the Allied views are moderate and anything like those outlined above it will give the moderate section the arguments they require for propaganda in the C.U.P., the Army and elsewhere, and thereby enable them to get control over the Organisation.

A communication of the views of the Allies could be made through a suitable source to Mouktar Bey, who is now in Switzerland as President of the Commission about the exchange of prisoners, and who will remain here till about 1st January, and who could probably be induced to stay longer if necessary. The communication should be made in this form; a suitable agent who could speak as one friendly to Turkey should inform Mouktar Bey that the views of the Allies in regard to Turkey are not extreme, that he has the best of reasons in fact for believing that the sort of terms they would be prepared to consider are so and so, and that if Talaat and the Committee wish to know what the views of the Entente are in regard to the future of Turkey they should make a request for information through an official channel when an official reply would be sent.

The effects of a moderate declaration by the Allies—which would be immediately known through the branches of the C.U.P.—would be (a) to stimulate and give sound arguments to the Ententophile propaganda within the Committee; (b) to hearten the Arabs in Arabia, Syria, Mesopotamia and Palestine by showing that the aim of the Entente was to secure them autonomy; (c) to further the antagonism between the Arab officers and troops within the Army and the Turkish officers and troops and so lower the morale of the army itself.

If the Ententophile section gained the ascendancy (probably through the murder of Enver) they believe they could deal with the German troops and officers in Turkey themselves. The C.U.P. is strong enough for that. But they fear a Bulgarian attack, and if there was any chance of the Revolution against German control taking place it would be necessary for the Entente to have ships and troops ready to rush through to Constantinople via Dardanelles or Smyrna.

There is one further point. The Ententophile section is much concerned over the financial problem. They owe about £300,000,000 to the Germans. So long as they owe this they cannot live as an independent power. They will simply be concession-ridden and in German hands. They want the Allies to help them in this matter, and also to give them a loan to enable them to reorganise Turkish finances. They also want agricultural machinery, etc., so as to raise food. Not the least of the inducements to the Turks to make a separate peace is the prospect of having the economic support of the Entente powers. They can only recover with outside assistance. German assistance means German control. If they could

see their way to making a fresh start in close relations with the Entente it would be a great inducement to them to make an immediate peace.

I arranged with Sir Horace Rumbold that subject to confirmation by telegram from London, Dr. Parodi should cause a communication in the following sense to be made unofficially and verbally to Mouktar Bey. The communication to take the form of a conversation between Mouktar Bey and a friend to Turkey who had exceptional means of knowing the views of the Allies. The exact method to be left to the discretion of Dr. Parodi.

1. That in view of the military reverses which had been already sustained by Turkey and of the tremendously strong position held by the Allies *vis-à-vis* the Central Powers, not merely militarily, but owing to their command of the economic resources of the world, a position which was bound to become steadily stronger, the Allies were by no means inspired by the hostile intentions attributed to them by the German propagandists, but were on the contrary moderate in their views and were quite prepared that Turkey should occupy an adequate place among the peoples of the world, provided she was willing to break immediately with Germany and make peace with the Allies.

2. That in the event of an immediate peace the Allies would be prepared, provided the Dardanelles, Sea of Marmora and the Bosphorus were neutralised, that Constantinople should remain the capital of Turkey. Neutralisation to consist of the dismantlement of all forts and the withdrawal of troops within a certain distance of the waterway, and the handing over of the control of

the waterway between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and of any quays and docks which might be necessary to an International Commission, as in the case of the Suez Canal.

3. That the Allies were determined that the Administrative Authority of the Turks must be entirely withdrawn from Armenia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Arabia, so that the inhabitants of these territories might conduct autonomous governments of their own, or be governed by a mixed system of local and European officials under the protection of one or more of the Allied Powers, as has been the case in Egypt. As to the international status of these territories, Armenia and Arabia would have to be entirely separated from the Turkish dominions. In the case of Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia, however, the Allies might be willing in the event of an immediate peace, to consider the retention of the Turkish flag as the symbol of Turkish suzerainty, provided it carried with it no executive authority.

4. That the Allies would be willing to free Turkey of the debt incurred in respect of the above-mentioned territories, to give liberal financial and other economic assistance to Turkey to enable her to make a fresh start, and to free herself from the German economic incubus, and so go forward as one of the states in friendly relations with the Entente group of powers, which is bound to be the strongest in the world.

NOTE.—Negotiations in regard to peace between Turkey and the Allies to be inaugurated upon the receipt of a private official enquiry from the Turkish Government, or any highly-placed Turkish statesman

or official of authority, which would be made via the British Legation, Berne, to the effect that the Turkish Government or such statesman or official was anxious to know the conditions which the Allies would propose for an immediate peace with Turkey. A method of communication could then be arranged.

19th December, 1917.

P. H. K.

APPENDIX II**THE PEACE DECLARATION : MR. LLOYD GEORGE'S
SPEECH TO THE TRADE UNIONS, 5TH JANUARY,
1918**

WHEN the Government invite organised labour in this country to assist them to maintain the might of their armies in the field, its representatives are entitled to ask that any misgivings and doubts which any of them may have about the purpose to which this precious strength is to be applied should be definitely cleared, and what is true of organised labour is equally true of all citizens in this country without regard to grade or avocation.

When men by the million are being called upon to suffer and face death and vast populations are being subjected to the sufferings and privations of war on a scale unprecedented in the history of the world, they are entitled to know for what cause or causes they are making the sacrifice. It is only the clearest, greatest and justest of causes that can justify the continuance even for one day of this unspeakable agony of the nations. And we ought to be able to state clearly and definitely not only the principles for which we are fighting, but also their definite and concrete application to the war map of the world.

We have arrived at the most critical hour in this terrible conflict, and before any Government takes the fateful decision as to the conditions under which it ought either to terminate or continue the struggle,

it ought to be satisfied that the conscience of the nation is behind these conditions, for nothing else can sustain the effort which is necessary to achieve a righteous end to this war. I have, therefore, during the last few days taken special pains to ascertain the view and the attitude of representative men of all sections of thought and opinion in the country. Last week I had the privilege not merely of perusing the declared war aims of the Labour Party, but also of discussing in detail with the Labour leaders the meaning and intention of that declaration. I have also had an opportunity of discussing this same momentous question with Mr. Asquith and Viscount Grey. Had it not been that the Nationalist leaders are in Ireland engaged in endeavouring to solve the tangled problem of Irish self-government, I should have been happy to exchange views with them, but Mr. Redmond, speaking on their behalf, has, with his usual lucidity and force, in many of his speeches, made clear what his ideas are as to the object and purpose of the War. I have also had the opportunity of consulting certain representatives of the great Dominions Overseas.

I am glad to be able to say as a result of all these discussions that although the Government are alone responsible for the actual language I propose using, there is national agreement as to the character and purpose of our war aims and peace conditions, and in what I say to you to-day, and through you to the world, I can venture to claim that I am speaking not merely the mind of the Government but of the nation and of the Empire as a whole.

We may begin by clearing away some misunderstandings and stating what we are *not* fighting for. We are not fighting a war of aggression against the

German people. Their leaders have persuaded them that they are fighting a war of self-defence against a league of rival nations bent on the destruction of Germany. That is not so. The destruction or disruption of Germany or the German people has never been a war aim with us from the first day of this war to this hour. Most reluctantly and, indeed quite unprepared for the dreadful ordeal, we were forced to join in this war in self-defence, in defence of the violated public law of Europe, and in vindication of the most solemn treaty obligations on which the public system of Europe rested, and on which Germany had ruthlessly trampled in her invasion of Belgium. We had to join in the struggle or stand aside and see Europe go under and brute force triumph over public right and international justice. It was only the realisation of that dreadful alternative that forced the British people into the War. And from that original attitude they have never swerved. They have never aimed at the break-up of the German peoples or the disintegration of their country or Empire. Germany has occupied a great position in the world. It is not our wish or intention to question or destroy that position for the future, but rather to turn her aside from hopes and schemes of military domination and to see her devote all her strength to the great beneficent tasks of humanity. Nor are we fighting to destroy Austria-Hungary or to deprive Turkey of its capital, or of the rich and renowned lands of Asia Minor and Thrace, which are predominantly Turkish in race.

Nor did we enter this war merely to alter or destroy the Imperial constitution of Germany, much as we consider that military autocratic constitution a dangerous anachronism in the twentieth century. Our

point of view is that the adoption of a really democratic constitution by Germany would be the most convincing evidence that in her the old spirit of military domination had indeed died in this war, and would make it much easier for us to conclude a broad democratic peace with her. But, after all, that is a question for the German people to decide.

It is now more than a year since the President of the United States, then neutral, addressed to the belligerents a suggestion that each side should state clearly the aims for which they were fighting. We and our Allies responded by the Note of the 10th January, 1917.

To the President's appeal the Central Empire made no reply, and in spite of many adjurations, both from their opponents and from neutrals, they have maintained a complete silence as to the objects for which they are fighting. Even on so crucial a matter as their intention with regard to Belgium they have uniformly declined to give any trustworthy indication.

On the 25th December last, however, Count Czernin, speaking on behalf of Austria-Hungary and her allies, did make a pronouncement of a kind. It is indeed deplorably vague. We are told that "it is not the intention" of the Central Powers "to appropriate forcibly" any occupied territories or "to rob of its independence" any nation which has lost its "political independence" during the War. It is obvious that almost any scheme of conquest and annexation could be perpetrated within the literal interpretation of such a pledge.

Does it mean that Belgium, Serbia, Montenegro and Roumania will be as independent and as free to direct their own destinies as the Germans or any other nation? Or does it mean that all manner of

interferences and restrictions, political and economic, incompatible with the status and dignity of a free and self-respecting people, are to be imposed? If this is the intention then there will be one kind of independence for a great nation and an inferior kind of independence for a small nation. We must know what is meant, for equality of right among nations, small as well as great, is one of the fundamental issues this country and her Allies are fighting to establish in this war. Reparation for the wanton damage inflicted on Belgian towns and villages and their inhabitants is emphatically repudiated. The rest of the so-called "offer" of the Central Powers is almost entirely a refusal of all concessions. All suggestions about the autonomy of subject nationalities are ruled out of the peace terms altogether. The question whether any form of self-government is to be given to Arabs, Armenians, or Syrians is declared to be entirely a matter for the Sublime Porte. A pious wish for the protection of minorities "in so far as it is practically realisable" is the nearest approach to liberty which the Central statesmen venture to make.

On one point only are they perfectly clear and definite. Under no circumstances will the "German demand" for the restoration of the whole of Germany's colonies be departed from. All principles of self-determination, or, as our earlier phrase goes, government by consent of the governed, here vanish into thin air.

It is impossible to believe that any edifice of permanent peace could be erected on such a foundation as this. Mere lip service to the formula of no annexations and no indemnities or the right of self-determination is useless. Before any negotiations

can even be begun, the Central Powers must realise the essential facts of the situation.

The days of the Treaty of Vienna are long past. We can no longer submit the future of European civilisation to the arbitrary decisions of a few negotiators striving to secure by chicanery or persuasion the interests of this or that dynasty or nation. The settlement of the new Europe must be based on such grounds of reason and justice as will give some promise of stability. *Therefore it is that we feel that government with the consent of the governed must be the basis of any territorial settlement in this war.* For that reason also, unless treaties be upheld, unless every nation is prepared at whatever sacrifice to honour the national signature, it is obvious that no Treaty of Peace can be worth the paper on which it is written.

The first requirement, therefore, always put forward by the British Government and their Allies, has been the complete restoration, political, territorial and economic, of the independence of Belgium and such reparation as can be made for the devastation of its towns and provinces. This is no demand for a war indemnity such as that imposed on France by Germany in 1871. It is not an attempt to shift the cost of warlike operations from one belligerent to another, which may or may not be defensible. It is no more and no less than an insistence that before there can be any hope for a stable peace, this great breach of the public law of Europe must be repudiated, and, so far as possible, repaired. Reparation means recognition. Unless international right is recognised by insistence on payment for injury done in defiance of its canons it can never be a reality. Next comes the restoration of Serbia, Montenegro, and the occupied parts of France, Italy and Roumania. The

complete withdrawal of the alien armies and the reparation for injustice done is a fundamental condition of permanent peace.

We mean to stand by the French democracy to the death in the demand they make for a reconsideration of the great wrong of 1871, when, without any regard to the wishes of the population, two French provinces were torn from the side of France and incorporated in the German Empire. This sore has poisoned the peace of Europe for half a century, and until it is cured healthy conditions will not have been restored. There can be no better illustration of the folly and wickedness of using a transient military success to violate national right.

I will not attempt to deal with the question of the Russian territories now in German occupation. The Russian policy since the Revolution has passed so rapidly through so many phases that it is difficult to speak without some suspension of judgment as to what the situation will be when the final terms of European peace come to be discussed. Russia accepted war with all its horrors because, true to her traditional guardianship of the weaker communities of her race, she stepped in to protect Serbia from a plot against her independence. It is this honourable sacrifice which not merely brought Russia into the War, but France as well. France, true to the conditions of her treaty with Russia, stood by her Ally in a quarrel which was not her own. Her chivalrous respect for her treaty led to the wanton invasion of Belgium ; and the treaty obligations of Great Britain to that little land brought us into the War.

The present rulers of Russia are now engaged without any reference to the countries whom Russia brought into the War, in separate negotiations, with

their common enemy. I am indulging in no reproaches ; I am merely stating facts with a view to making it clear why Britain cannot be held accountable for decisions taken in her absence, and concerning which she has not been consulted or her aid invoked. No one who knows Prussia and her designs upon Russia can for a moment doubt her ultimate intention. Whatever phrases she may use to delude Russia, she does not mean to surrender one of the fair provinces or cities of Russia now occupied by her forces. Under one name or another—and the name hardly matters—these Russian provinces will henceforth be in reality part of the dominions of Prussia. They will be ruled by the Prussian sword in the interests of Prussian autocracy, and the rest of the people of Russia will be partly enticed by specious phrases and partly bullied by the threat of continued war against an impotent army into a condition of complete economic and ultimate political enslavement to Germany. We all deplore the prospect. *The democracy of this country means to stand to the last by the democracies of France and Italy and all our other Allies.* We shall be proud to fight to the end side by side with the new democracy of Russia, so will America and so will France and Italy. But if the present rulers of Russia take action which is independent of their Allies we have no means of intervening to arrest the catastrophe which is assuredly befalling their country. Russia can only be saved by her own people.

We believe, however, that an independent Poland, comprising all those genuinely Polish elements who desire to form part of it, is an urgent necessity for the stability of Western Europe.

Similarly, though we agree with President Wilson that the break-up of Austria-Hungary is no part of our

war aims, we feel that, unless genuine self-government on true democratic principles is granted to those Austro-Hungarian nationalities who have long desired it, it is impossible to hope for the removal of those causes of unrest in that part of Europe which have so long threatened its general peace.

On the same grounds we regard as vital the satisfaction of the legitimate claims of the Italians for union with those of their own race and tongue. We also mean to press that justice be done to men of Roumanian blood and speech in their legitimate aspirations. If these conditions are fulfilled Austria-Hungary would become a Power whose strength would conduce to the permanent peace and freedom of Europe, instead of being merely an instrument for the pernicious military autocracy of Prussia that uses the resources of its allies for the furtherance of its own sinister purposes.

Outside Europe we believe that the same principles should be applied. While we do not challenge the maintenance of the Turkish Empire in the homelands of the Turkish race with its capital at Constantinople—the passage between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea being internationalised and neutralised—Arabia, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine are in our judgment entitled to a recognition of their separate national conditions.

What the exact form of that recognition in each particular case should be need not here be discussed, beyond stating that it would be impossible to restore to their former sovereignty the territories to which I have already referred.

Much has been said about the arrangements we have entered into with our Allies on this and on other subjects. I can only say that as new circumstances,

like the Russian collapse and the separate Russian negotiations, have changed the conditions under which those arrangements were made, we are, and always have been, perfectly ready to discuss them with our Allies.

With regard to the German colonies, I have repeatedly declared that they are held at the disposal of a Conference whose decision must have primary regard to the wishes and interests of the native inhabitants of such colonies. None of those territories are inhabited by Europeans. The governing consideration, therefore, in all these cases must be that the inhabitants should be placed under the control of an administration acceptable to themselves, one of whose main purposes will be to prevent their exploitation for the benefit of European capitalists or Governments. The natives live in their various tribal organisations under chiefs and councils who are competent to consult and speak for their tribes and members, and thus to represent their wishes and interests in regard to their disposal.

The general principle of national self-determination is therefore as applicable in their cases as in those of occupied European territories. The German declaration, that the natives of the German colonies have, through their military fidelity in the War, shown their attachment and resolve under all circumstances to remain with Germany, is applicable not to the German colonies generally, but only to one of them, and in that case (German East Africa) the German authorities secured the attachment, not of the native population as a whole, which is, and remains, profoundly anti-German, but only of a small warlike class from whom their Askaris, or soldiers, were selected. These they attached to themselves by

conferring on them a highly privileged position as against the bulk of the native population, which enabled these Askaris to assume a lordly and oppressive superiority over the rest of the natives. By this and other means they secured the attachment of a very small and insignificant minority whose interests were directly opposed to those of the rest of the population, and for whom they have no right to speak. The German treatment of their native populations in their colonies has been such as amply to justify their fear of submitting the future of those colonies to the wishes of the natives themselves.

Finally, there must be reparation for injuries done in violation of international law. The Peace Conference must not forget our seamen and the services they have rendered to, and the outrages they have suffered for, the common cause of freedom.

One omission we notice in the proposal of the Central Powers, which seems to us especially regrettable. It is desirable, and indeed essential, that the settlement after this war shall be one which does not in itself bear the seed of future war. But that is not enough. However wisely and well we may make territorial and other arrangements, there will still be many subjects of international controversy. Some indeed are inevitable.

The economic conditions at the end of the War will be in the highest degree difficult. Owing to the diversion of human effort to warlike pursuits, there must follow a world-shortage of raw materials, which will increase the longer the War lasts, and it is inevitable that those countries which have control of the raw materials will desire to help themselves and their friends first.

Apart from this, whatever settlement is made will be suitable only to the circumstances under which it is made, and, as those circumstances change, changes in the settlement will be called for.

So long as the possibility of dispute between nations continues, that is to say, so long as men and women are dominated by passionate ambition, and war is the only means of settling a dispute, all nations must live under the burden not only of having from time to time to engage in it, but of being compelled to prepare for its possible outbreak. The crushing weight of modern armaments, the increasing evil of compulsory military service, the vast waste of wealth and effort involved in warlike preparation, these are blots on our civilisation of which every thinking individual must be ashamed.

For these and other similar reasons, we are confident that a great attempt must be made to establish by some international organisation an alternative to war as a means of settling international disputes. After all war is a relic of barbarism, and, just as law has succeeded violence as the means of settling disputes between individuals, so we believe that it is destined ultimately to take the place of war in the settlement of controversies between nations.

If, then, we are asked what are we fighting for, we reply, as we have often replied : We are fighting for a just and a lasting peace, and we believe that before permanent peace can be hoped for three conditions must be fulfilled.

First, the sanctity of treaties must be re-established ; secondly, a territorial settlement must be secured based on the right of self-determination or the consent of the governed ; and, lastly, we must seek by the creation of some international organisation to limit

the burden of armaments and diminish the probability of war.

In these conditions the British Empire would welcome peace, to secure those conditions its peoples are prepared to make even greater sacrifices than those they have yet endured.

CHAPTER LXXI

BOLSHEVISM CONQUERS RUSSIA

THERE are two of the direct consequences of the War which have already exerted a palpable influence on the course of human affairs and will continue to do so more and more as the years roll by. One is the establishment of the League of Nations—the other is the Russian Revolution. The question whether the Russian Revolution will have as great an effect on the lives of the people in all countries as had the French Revolution, or an even greater, will be determined by one eventuality: it will depend on whether its leaders can keep their movement in the paths of peaceable development or whether its energies will be wasted and its purpose deflected by war. If Russia remains at peace then the Revolution will become one of the greatest factors in fashioning the destiny of the masses in all lands which mankind has ever witnessed or experienced.

Those of us who had entertained the hope that the Russian Revolution would consolidate and reinvigorate the fighting strength of Russia in the last War came reluctantly to recognise as time went on how incalculable is the course of all revolutions. The rot in Russia had gone too far, and had eaten too

deeply into the existing organisation of the Russian State to be cured by bandaging the sore at a clearing station under gun-fire. The Provisional Government, which had ruled Russia since the abdication of the Czar, thought temporary remedies could be applied to Russia's wounds in order to send her back to the fighting line. That Government fell at the end of May because it was so completely out of touch with realities.

It is no use saying now that if the Russian reformers had thrown up one strong man and placed him in command then events would have taken a different turn. Often the strong man
Great men in a revolution is not the person who
in revolutions initiates it, but the man who subsequently exploits it. Events precipitate a situation, personalities fashion its shape and direct its course.

There are those who contend that no personality, however powerful he may be, can ordain the course of events, or change them except transitionally. Their interpretation of great historical upheavals is that the times are ripe for certain happenings and that they would occur, even if a great man had not appeared on the scene and pulled the lever which precipitated them. This always seems to me to be a misreading of history. There have been occasions in which a man of power has postponed, if not averted, a catastrophe which seemed imminent and was ultimately inevitable. There have also been times when a strong man has accelerated changes which but for him would have been long postponed. Nations become static just as individuals sink into indolence. In that condition they both deteriorate. A strong influence may shake them up and thus save them. Lvoff and Miliukoff could not have directed the

Neither could Korniloff. It might have ended in utter anarchy and the break-up of Russia into numerous small and warring states fighting about undefined frontiers, or it might have culminated in another military dictatorship. Russia was accustomed to the sovereignty of a great soldier. Korniloff very nearly established such an autocracy. Lenin, with the aid of Trotsky, averted these calamities and directed Russia through chaos, bloodshed, and suffering into an amazing Reformation which, if it succeeds, may yet change the whole economic conditions of the world.

The one really powerful personality thrown up by the Russian Revolution was more concerned about overthrowing the existing order of society than about defeating the Germans. *Strength of Lenin* Lenin was an exile from Russia when the Revolution broke out. The first reforming leaders were not anxious to welcome his presence. He owes his return to the facilities provided by the German military authorities who thought that he would be an element of discord in Russia and thus help to break up Russian unity. Their calculation was sound. But what a price Germany has paid and is still paying for a short-lived triumph! It is difficult to take long views in war. Victory is the only horizon. It is a lesson to the statesmanship which takes short-sighted views of a situation and seizes the chance of a temporary advantage without counting the certainty of future calamity.

Soon after the Revolution broke out the shadow of the tremendous figure of Lenin began to rise above the horizon. It fell on the green table of Downing Street for the first time in a despatch from Sir George Buchanan, who wrote as follows.



Lenin

Petrograd,

30th April, 1917.

As you will have seen from my telegram the situation here continues in much the same state of uncertainty as before and it is impossible to say what may happen from day to day. If one listens to Ministers one hears that all is going well and that the Government is gradually consolidating its position ; while, if one takes the opinion of those who are in touch both with the Government and the Workmen's Council, one gets exactly the opposite impression. A battle royal seems to be proceeding between Kerensky and Miliukoff on the famous formula 'Peace without annexation,' and, as the majority of Ministers are, according to all accounts, on Kerensky's side, I should not be surprised if Miliukoff has to go, as he remarked the other day that he would be a traitor were he to give in on the subject of Constantinople. He would be a loss in any way as he represents the moderate element in the Cabinet and is sound on the subject of war ; but he is not a strong man and has so little influence with his colleagues that one never knows whether he will be able to give effect to what he says. If he does go there is no saying who his successor will be, but I trust that it will in any case be someone who can speak with authority in the name of the Government.

The Government is still playing a waiting game and prefers that the initiative in dealing with Lenin should come from the people, rather than that they themselves should give the order for his arrest. They are probably right, as the feeling against Lenin is growing stronger both among the

soldiers and the people, I should not indeed be surprised if things came to a crisis during the May Day celebrations to-morrow. If there is to be a row, and perhaps more street fighting, I would sooner that the crisis came at once so that we may get it over and that the country may be able to give more attention to the War. The military situation is no doubt very unsatisfactory ; but there are, I think, signs of improvement and the Russians have such a happy knack of getting out of scrapes, that I personally do not take such a pessimistic view of it as some of our experts who judge it more particularly from the deplorable lack of discipline reported from certain points on the front. I am afraid, however, that the Army will not be able to take the offensive so soon as some of the Ministers had led me to believe. This is to be regretted, as the sooner the fighting begins the better it will be for the internal situation.

It is most difficult to express an opinion on the relative positions of the Provisional Government and the Council of Workmen and Soldiers' Deputies. The latter is being completely reorganised. Its numbers have been reduced to 600 and a new Executive Committee has been appointed. The effect of this reorganisation will be to render it a more moderate, but at the same time, a stronger body. It is not therefore likely to renounce its claim to control and direct the policy of the Government, but if it is really animated by a greater spirit of moderation it may perhaps work more harmoniously than before with the Provisional Government. On the other hand, the possibility of a conflict between the two rival bodies cannot altogether be excluded. It seems that the former

Extremist Members, who are not included in the reorganised Council, are going to set up a Committee of their own and I trust that, as I remarked to Miliukoff yesterday, this does not mean that there will be three instead of two rival Governments. I do not think that the Council is likely to press for an early peace ; but it will probably give us a good deal of trouble as to the terms on which the Allies ought to accept peace and as to the interpretation to be placed on the word ' annexation.' The chief danger that I foresee is the not improbable eventuality of Germany putting forward plausible conditions of peace, as such overtures might be seized on by the pacifists here and pressure be brought on the Government to induce the Allies to open peace negotiations. . . .

They are now attacking our Labour Delegates as being the paid emissaries of the Government and not real representatives of British labour. It is very difficult to know what to do with people who stick to their preconceived ideas and will not listen to reason. . . ."

Here is some light thrown on the scandalmongering in high places which was a prelude to the poor Czar's downfall. It did much to bring about the Revolution :—

" Felix Yousoupoff, who came to see me the other day with a message from the Empress Marie, told me that he knew as a fact that the
The Czar's Emperor had been treated by a
drugs Thibetan Doctor here with drugs that had seriously affected his mental powers. He had himself been taken by Rasputin to see this Doctor one day when he was feeling unwell, and,

on the question as to the effect of these drugs being broached by Rasputin, the Thibetan had said that, if taken for any length of time, they produced in the patient a state of callousness and complete insensibility to anything that befell him. Yousoupoff said that he had afterwards extracted from Rasputin the admission that the Emperor had had a course of these drugs, and he believes that they are in a great measure responsible for the Emperor's abnormal conduct and almost childish indifference to the loss of his Crown. He could not say who it was that had induced the Emperor to take them ; but the idea had evidently originated with someone who wished to render the Emperor incapable of having a will of his own. I have been told much the same story by the Grand Duke Nicolas Michailovitch and others and after what Yousoupoff said I think there must be some foundation for it."

The letter reads like a despatch from Paris after the fall of the Bastille, when gossip about the tragic Royalties of the day was becoming more and more calumnious and when Marat and Robespierre were profiting by it to challenge the Girondists with their respectable revolution.

Kerensky was a man of high ideals, but he had a highly-strung and nervous temperament. Like the Girondists he ~~was~~ endowed with an unsurpassed gift of dynamic eloquence which moved vast audiences to any display of emotion he sought to arouse.

But he relied too much on oratory and did not follow it by deeds. Rhetoric which does not lead to action is mere play-acting. This defect foredoomed him to

*Nervousness
of Kerensky*

failure' when he was confronted with men whose first impulse was action. It marks the difference between the rhetorician and the revolutionary. The situation needed a man of a sterner make than Kerensky. One of the shrewdest observers we sent to Russia, General Knox, who was at the head of Russian affairs at this time, thought that "the heart of the people was sound, but that force was required, and force could have been assembled if the Government had contained a single man of will." As Lenin represented at that time only a minority of the workers and practically none of the peasants, General Knox's view is probably correct.

The Allies were anxious to give the Russian Government every help in their power to stabilise its position at home and to reconstitute its front towards the enemy. They believed that even now a whole-hearted and sympathetic effort on their part to give Russia practical support would rally and unite her people, and keep her in the War as an effective fighting force.

But the powerful forces that were at work against us were irresolutely grappled with by the Provisional Government. Lenin, Zinovieff and others had arrived at Petrograd in April via Germany, and throughout the early summer of 1917 their influence was gradually gaining in power, while the discipline in the Russian Army was as steadily diminishing.

Here is a picturesque but discerning account of the situation from a British officer who wrote from Cronstadt at this time of perplexity and confusion :—

*Report of
conditions at
Cronstadt*

" . . . Just at the moment the industrial situation is grave. Skobelev, the Minister

of Labour, delivers himself of declarations which read like a nightmare of undigested terminology. Confiscation of bank surpluses, whatever that may mean, being the latest on Friday ; the Minister of Commerce, Konovaloff, resigned in a demonstration against him, saying that it was impossible to maintain output or financial equilibrium in face of the unchecked demands of the workpeople. Under occidental conditions Skobeleff would be a State-control man and Konovaloff a Manchester Liberal, as far as I can make out. Unfortunately, just now there is in Russia no State to control anything. Men are striking for 100 per cent. rises retrospective to the beginning of the War, for six-hour days, for six months' payment in advance. One firm has been confronted with a demand for increases which amount to about 20 per cent. more than its capital. The same firm had been making a profit of 40 per cent.

All our domestic troubles with labour are here seen magnified ; prices four times the normal and profits accordingly. Wages two and a half times the normal and therefore forcing up prices without overtaking them. To this add fraud and corruption on one side and the complete absence of any organisation on the other. Two years of paper money (they are said to be issuing another 2,000 million roubles) and two months of revolution complete the tale, which is one of simple disintegration.

As for politics, take this as an instance. Cronstadt has proclaimed itself as an independent republic. At the bottom of this remarkable act was apparently nothing more than a simple belief in the wisdom and beauty of decentralisation which happened to be the word in vogue. The Repub-

licans were genuinely shocked when the Commandant said that being an officer of the Government he must go ; they explained that they didn't want him to go, so why should he ? All yesterday the rumour was that they were going to bombard us ; Socialist deputations trickled down all day to give them their first lessons in Political Science. To-day the current account is that the Government was going to attack Cronstadt with an army according to some, with destroyers according to others. There is to be a railway strike next week. I am trying hard to find out whether in all this welter there is anything like a Labour Executive in the Council ; the Commercial Attaché thinks there is a kind of clearing house through which the demands of the workpeople are passed. If there is, then with Skobelev vague but fervently determined to do something and a Labour group actually collating the workpeople's unrestrained desire for a good time, there may be something for Henderson to work on. Next to strike and Cronstadt, the great topic of discussion is peace v. offensive. I am inclined to think that the policy of the Government is to coax the people into a summer offensive in the hope that peace will then slip into the background. I am not hopeful. Everyone is clear that Russia is sick of the War. The only other thing they are clear on is that in Russia you never know what will happen next and several people have told me that Petrograd is even sicker of the existing state of affairs. Next time, they say, the Cossacks will shoot. . . ."

Contemporary letters written by experienced and observant men who were passing through the

experiences of the first weeks of the Revolution threw a valuable light not merely on this particular convulsion, but on the process by which discontent develops into revolution through unwise and ineffective handling.

On 15th June, just before Kerensky's assumption of office, our Ambassador wrote :—

“ . . . The situation in Petrograd is as bad as ever, which is hardly to be wondered at seeing that there is no proper police force to maintain order ; and the uncertain attitude of the troops causes the Government considerable anxiety. There are, however, signs of a reaction, not in favour of a monarchy, but of a stable Government capable of maintaining order and putting an end to the existing anarchy that is steadily spreading over the country. The Government, has, I am convinced, only to act with firmness and it will have the mass of the people behind it. From what Terestchenko tells me, they consider that the psychological moment has arrived for action and, if he really represents their views, they are going to get rid of the Petrograd garrison and employ the Cossacks, who can be thoroughly relied on, should the occasion arise. The result of the recent municipal elections shows that the Extremists are but a small minority and their position is likely to be seriously compromised if, as he hopes, Terestchenko is able to prove that many of their leaders are in German pay. The convocation of an all-Russian Conference of Delegates from all the Workmen's Councils in Russia, which is to meet in a day or two, will be a new and interesting factor in the situation. It will transform the local Council into a national one and invest

*Buchanan
reports
growing
confusion*

it with greater authority and influence. It is generally expected that the admission of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies from the provinces will act in a moderating sense, and if this proves to be the case there will be closer co-operation between the Council and the Government. . . .

As regards the Army the outlook is more hopeful, though the pessimists declare that it is quite incapable of taking an offensive. Ministers, on the other hand, speak with considerable confidence and an offensive will, in my opinion, be certainly undertaken as soon as the difficulties of supplies, etc., have been surmounted, but with what measure of success it will be attended is a matter on which I will not venture to prophesy. . . .

Since writing the above I have seen the Chief of the General Staff who told me that the latest information from the front was far more satisfactory, and that the offensive would be taken within the next fortnight. . . ."

Another letter, written from another source on 24th June, ran as follows :—

" We had another crisis on 22nd-23rd June which most people thought would not be surmounted without serious bloodshed. *Confirmation from another source* The 'Bolsheviki' called on all their followers to make an armed demonstration against the Government, who had allied themselves with the capitalists and were responsible for the War and all the misery entailed by it. Leaflets of an even more inflammatory kind were distributed inciting to open violence.

Fortunately the Government had just been reinforced by votes of confidence from the All-Russian Council of Labour and Soldiers' Delegates and the All-Russian Peasants' Congress ; and those two bodies, backed by the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Council and all the Socialist organisations, issued counter-proclamations requesting everyone to stay at home. The Government forbade all demonstrations for three days, and even the *Pravda* and the *Novaia Zhizn* supported them. The result was that yesterday was perfectly quiet and to-day, Sunday, looks as if it would be the same. . . .

The possible result may be imagined. It seems to me that the longer bloodshed is put off the more chance there is of avoiding it and all its incalculable results. A few judicious arrests would be another matter when the Government feel that the time is ripe. . . .

Terestchenko attaches the greatest importance to not weakening the Salonika Front at present, as you know, and wants the whole thing thrashed out at Paris. . . . At the moment of writing, it looks as if an offensive really would take place, but the results it is quite useless to try to foresee. Most people think that a failure will be a disaster. There is no doubt that the Army at the front is in a better state than it was ; but the divisions vary terribly in their 'morale' and few have their heart in the business.

. . . Most people think it out of the question that the Russian troops will consent to pass another winter in the trenches, whatever the higher command may desire. It does not follow that this is correct and it won't, probably, be clear till

September whether it is so or not ; but the contingency must be considered. If it proves correct, the question arises whether it would not be desirable in the general interest that Russia should make peace before she is overwhelmed—especially if Austria were at the same time to drop out. I know the enormous difficulties in the way of this arrangement, and I do not think that, at the present moment, the Russian Government would listen to a proposal of the kind. Nevertheless, I draw your attention to it because I have for some time been trying to think of the best way out of our difficulties in the event of a general dissolution of the Russian Army under the influence of the first snows.”

At the beginning of July, in spite of their internal difficulties, the Russian Army, under General Brusiloff, took the offensive against the Germans and in one place succeeded in breaking through the enemy lines to a depth of seven miles over a front of 14 miles. In the course of the whole offensive they took 26,000 prisoners and 84 guns.

Brusiloff's offensive But the offensive was not sustained. The army did not want to fight. Discipline had disappeared. On 10th July, General Knox sent a despatch in which he described the offensive and indicated the extent to which indiscipline prevailed throughout the whole of the Russian Army and the general collapse of morale. The demoralisation and disintegration seems to have started in the lower ranks of the Army—the result of dissatisfaction with conditions which had prevailed since the beginning of the War, and before.

Here is a description of the fight by General Knox :—

“ There were evidences of indiscipline everywhere. Every bivouac of a mounted unit was full of horses galloping backwards and forwards untied, every village full of horses tied up without food in the sun for hours while their owners slept or attended meetings. No one seemed to do a full day's work except the company cooks. The roads near the front were in a disgraceful state and no one made an attempt to repair them, while the men spent the day in bathing and in lying drying in the sun. No observation post that I saw was properly defended and many of them were not even properly concealed. Most of the mechanical transport was handed over to ‘ delegates,’ who seem now to have priority over the staff and the service of supply.

Most of the staffs were changed a short time before the action. All the corps commanders and most of the divisional commanders had been changed in the past three months.

However, all the regular officers that have survived the War and Revolution worked heroically to stem the tide of socialistic cowardice and to restore order out of chaos. . . .

The operations were postponed two days to allow of the arrival of the Minister of War, who brought with him the proclamation of the All-Russia Council or Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies calling on the troops to take the offensive. Kerensky spent his first day in the 11th Army and had a bad reception in the 2nd Guard Infantry Division, half of the men of which refused to give him a

hearing. No one really knew whether the infantry would attack, few of the units were actively mutinous, but almost every division had one bad regiment. The cavalry and artillery were sound. . . .

The infantry, with the exception of some few regiments, commenced well. . . .

Progress, however, was much interfered with by the indiscipline and stupidity of the men. The left regiment of the 16th Division had been allotted a passive task. . . .

The observation posts were crowded by correspondents, army delegates and idle soldier spectators who hampered the officers at work. . . .

At 2 p.m. I went to the headquarters of the 7th Army, where I sat in the General Quartermaster's room and got a general idea of progress. All were then in good spirits, but from 3 p.m. the picture began to change.

The 74th Division was making no progress and complained of heavy gun-fire from its left. The Commander-in-Chief, who was with Kerensky, telephoned that many men of this Division were streaming to the rear, and ordered that all available delegates be dispatched at once to hearten them. The 'delegate' is now looked upon as the universal panacea, but he is not half so effective as were the subaltern's boot and fist in former times. . . .

The retirement can only be explained by the miserable morale of the infantry. The men were impressed by an artillery fire to which they had been little accustomed and they went as far as the enemy's trenches had been destroyed. They had lost many of their officers and had no incentive to further effort; in fact, they knew that further progress would be attended by risk, while they

could retire without fear of being punished. To dig themselves in was too much trouble, so they went back to their old ready-made defences. . . .

The 81st Czech Regiment surrendered *en bloc* to the VIth Corps and the next day marched to the rear through Tarnopol headed by its band.

The Russian losses were given officially two days later—17,339 killed, wounded and missing.

. . . The Chief of Military Communications of the South-West Front superintended the evacuation of the wounded from Kozova on the 1st July. He states that in a train of 850 cases he considers that only some 15 men were really wounded ; the remainder were wounded in the hands, and he suspected that many of the wounds were self-inflicted.

On the night of the 1st July, the 19th Siberian and 23rd Divisions of the XXXIVth Corps and the Corps Staff were withdrawn on relief by the IIInd Guard Corps. The units of the XLIst Corps gave it to be understood that they would not attack again. The 7th Army has not moved since.

Now simply on account of the disaffection in this Corps the whole advance of the 11th Army had to stop on the 3rd, 4th and 5th.

Morale and discipline—Kerensky has appointed 'commissaries' to each army to assist in the maintenance of discipline. These men are all hall-marked revolutionaries. Most of them have spent several years in penal servitude. The commissary of the 11th Army was six years in Siberia ; the one in the 7th Army, Savinkov, was the chief organiser of the murder of the Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich, since which he has lived in Switzerland. They are both working with courage, and

in complete agreement with the Command to re-establish orders.

I was struck by the terrible position of the officers in one of the Finland Regiments visited.

Terrible position of officers They were mere boys who had just joined from the military schools. They were all anxious to do their best, but found themselves at once the object of wholly unmerited suspicion.

During some trench negotiations on the Northern Front recently some German officers came over, and there was an informal discussion regarding the causes of the War. The Russian and German officers, of course, disagreed, but a Russian soldier said that he preferred the word of a German officer to that of a Russian one. In taking leave the German officers told the Russians that they were 'really sorry' for them, for their 'position was dreadful.'

The Polish Division has been hastily filled by Catholic recruits from Volhynia and Podolya. Its discipline is bad, and it refused for some weeks to go near the front. Its commander, General Simon, though a Pole, asked to be transferred to serve with Russian troops, as he could 'do nothing with the Poles.' The Division has now been weeded out. Company commanders pointed out to the Commissary the men they wished to get rid of. For instance, one company leader said, pointing out one of his men: 'One night on the march I mistook the road and led the company 40 yards out of its way. I overheard this man say to the company: "Gentlemen, I suggest we throw this son of a pig into the river".'

The Commander of the 1st Division of the Guard

told me that his officers were martyrs suffering daily tortures. Some nights ago a company commander of the Yegerski Regiment was riding along with his command when his men called to him through the darkness to get off, as they did not see why a 'bourgeois' should ride when they walked. When he dismounted the men at once began to consider whether he had not better ride so as to be able the quicker to get them billets when they arrived at their destination. He mounted again, and they again required him to dismount. This officer cannot have been much good, but after all he was only following the example set by his superiors in yielding to the men in everything.

It is impossible to avoid the uncomfortable conclusion that the war in Russia is coming more and more to be regarded as a secondary matter. . . .

General Klembovski, the Commander-in-Chief of the Northern Front, is reported by several papers to have said in a recent speech at Riga, that the present offensive was all-important because a winter campaign was impossible, and all the combatants would soon begin negotiations for peace.

Kerensky works hard as Minister of War, but his speciality is revolution, and he does not yet altogether grasp that the only way to cause revolution in Germany is to defeat her army in the field. Even at the front, half his attention is directed to Stockholm. On the 1st July three German prisoners, the first taken, were led past his observation post. He sent to ask them—not what troops were on their right and left and rear—what political party they belonged to and whether there would soon be a revolution in Germany. They replied

they did not belong to any political party. They did not know anything about the interior of Germany, but at the front where they had been all the War there was no sign of a revolution.

I was sitting with the General Quartermaster of the 7th Army at Buchach the day before we moved up to the front for the offensive, when two members of the Petrograd Council of Working Men and Soldier Deputies were announced. They had come to lecture on two things, War and Peace and the Constituent Assembly.

Ensign Krilenko, an anti-war socialist, stated in a speech delivered to the Committee of the 11th Army that he had organised a plebiscite in the 13th Finland Regiment regarding the course of action to be followed by Russia in three eventualities :—

1. If the Allies abandoned all claim to annexations, but Germany did not.
2. If both the Allies and Germany refused to abandon the idea of annexations.
3. If the Allies refused to abandon the claim to annexations but Germany agreed to do so.

The reply, he stated, was in each case 'war,' but in the third case 'war against the Allies.'

This man calmly contemplates war against the world and maintains that the worst that could befall Russia would be the loss of the Caucasus, Finland, Siberia and Poland. He professed to believe in the existence of secret treaties between England and Germany.

Most officers shudder at the idea of a fourth winter of war. They often quote Hindenburg's

remark about nerves and confess that Russian nerves have been the first to give way.

Korniloff told me that he considered the offensive the last chance, and that the economic condition of Russia and the breakdown of the railways will make the continuation of the War through a fourth winter impossible. The Report of the American Railway Commission on these matters will be of interest.

The opinion of Ignatiev, who now commands the 1st Division of the Infantry of the Guard, is worth quoting, for he is capable and generally a cheery optimist. He is a younger brother of the Count Ignatiev, late Minister of Education, and their father was the Ambassador at Constantinople.

He considers that peace is essential for Russia, for if there is not peace soon there will be a general massacre. The prolongation of the War is driving the country to economic ruin. From the very beginning the peasants had hated the War, which was only at first popular with the educated classes. He said, 'If you were to go out into the square now, and to announce that the War will end at once on the one condition that Nikolai Romanov return to power, everyone would at once agree, and there would be no more talk of a democratic republic.' (I believe this is true. The Revolution has been a revolt against the burden of the War, and not a protest, as the English Press at first tried to pretend, against the half-hearted way in which the late Government prosecuted the War.)

I asked Ignatiev whether the reconsideration of the terms of peace would have any effect on

Russian public opinion. He said it would on conscientious people, but the mass of the soldiery only wanted an excuse for saving their skin. They belonged neither to the party of the Bolsheviki nor to that of the Mensheviki, but were 'Skurniki'* pure and simple, i.e. 'fearers for their own skin.'

I pointed out that if by any chance Germany were not beaten as she deserved it would be entirely Russia's fault. He agreed and said he fully expected that no foreigner would speak to a Russian for the next twenty years. In England's place he would get out of the War as soon as possible while there was yet time. . . ."

At the Inter-Allied Conference in Paris on 25th and 26th July we took stock of the Russian position, in view of the disturbing news from that front. It was quite clear that the situation had got completely out of hand as far as Kerensky and his Government were concerned. The abolition of the death penalty, and to a great extent the impotence of the officers to inflict any other punishment for indiscipline, had made it impossible to deal with desertion and even with insubordination. But it is doubtful whether any penalties would have re-established discipline. The probability is that their infliction would have precipitated open mutiny. The position of Kerensky was indeed desperate. He had to stimulate and organise the Armies in the field, which were rapidly disintegrating into an incoherent rabble, whilst simultaneously he had to confront seditious risings and rebellions in and around his own capital. All the time, the Bolsheviki were plotting to undermine

*View of
Inter-Allied
Conference
in July*

* Skura—A Skin.

his authority as soon as he thought he had re-established it. Was ever man more precariously situated? It needed a leader of dominating power and decision to control and direct such a situation. Kerensky was a man of genius, but it was not the genius of action.

At the Paris Conference, the British representative put forward a memorandum containing suggestions for giving help to Russia which were as follows :—

“ . . . The Allied Governments should make every sacrifice in order to retain Russia in the Alliance, and, by affording her constant support in every department, to infuse into her Government the energy necessary to hold out at all costs. . . .

*Help for
Russia
proposed*

To carry out this programme, France, Great Britain and the United States, the only powers in a position to act in Russia, should come to an agreement without delay to determine the part to be assigned to each of them.

Questions of propaganda in the interior of the country, and of financial and economic help are matters for the Government concerned, and are not treated in the present Memoranda.

From the point of view of military and economic help it would seem that the activities of the Allies might be distributed as follows :—

England will attend to the Navy.

France to the Army. 🐉

United States to the reorganisation of transport.

In this task of reorganisation, Japan could, perhaps, co-operate by furnishing material or technical labour.”

The Military Conference which met on 26th July

was attended by Generals Cadorna, Robertson, Pershing, Pétain and Foch. Their statement was an indication of the grave consequences which they apprehended would ensue from the desertion of the Allied cause by Russia :—

*Opinion of
military
chiefs*

“ The fall of Russia would entail the following consequences :—

Political. It would modify the political aims of the Entente. It is, therefore, suggested that the Governments should at once consider and decide what would be the new political aims to be pursued.

Economic. It would place at the disposal of the Central Powers the vast resources of Russia, especially grain, and thereby greatly minimise the efficiency of the blockade.

Morale. It might result, especially in the case of the smaller Allies in the Balkans, in a profound depression which might cause them to seek a separate peace. It is practically certain that Roumania would be compelled to share the fate of Russia and that, in consequence, the Bulgarian forces, and even a certain number of Turkish divisions, might be free to augment the forces at the enemy's disposal.”

Events were marching very fast in Russia—too fast for control by a divided and flaccid Ministry.

Most of the Ministers were able men but there was no agreement amongst them and there was no compelling personality to direct and unite them in a coherent effort. A crisis arose in Petrograd over the recognition

*Bolshevik
rising of
16th July*

of autonomy for the Ukraine, and four Ministers of the Cadet Party resigned. There were disorders and fighting in Petrograd. The effect of the news from the capital upon the troops at the front was devastating. They practically abandoned trenches, guns and ammunition to the Germans without striking a blow.

Whilst the Paris Conference was in session, a despatch was on its way to us from our Ambassador in Petrograd which gave a vivid account of the chaos reigning there, and of the outbreak of disorders and rebellion that, although for the moment suppressed, were destined to recur and increase until the last remnants of order and government melted away in a sea of anarchy.

Sir George Buchanan's message, dated 23rd July, 1917, describes how, on hearing of the resignation of

*Buchanan's
account*

the four Cadet members of the Government on the 16th, he had gone to visit Terestchenko, one of the leading Ministers, whom he found laid up with internal trouble. Terestchenko was querulously indignant at the desertion of the Cadets, instigated by Miliukoff, over the Ukrainian question, which broke up the Coalition Government, but he evidently had no inkling of the storm of riot and civil conflict that was imminent in the capital. Indeed, the story told in this graphic letter illumines once more the historic truth that successful revolutions are generally due to the obtuseness of able but unimaginative men in authority, who quarrel amongst themselves about trivial repairs, improvements and decorations to the building while the whole fabric is tottering to a complete crash. Terestchenko here was worrying about Constantinople, and Miliukoff about Ukrainian

autonomy, when the whole structure of Russia was collapsing into flaming fissures.

Buchanan's letter goes on to relate how that very evening motor lorries and cars filled with armed soldiers and machine-guns began to pour into the streets of Petrograd. Presently a long procession formed :—

“ It was composed of a large number of workmen and three regiments—all fully armed—with banners bearing the usual inscriptions—‘ Down with the Ten Capitalistic Ministers ’ ; ‘ Down with War ’ ; ‘ Give us Bread,’ etc. The majority marched across the Champ de Mars into the town. We soon afterwards heard shots at the back of the Embassy and many of the crowd bolted for safety down the quay. There was rifle and machine-gun firing in many quarters of the town during the greater part of the night. A number of motor cars filled with soldiers went to the Warsaw station to arrest Kerensky, but fortunately only got there a quarter of an hour after he had left. Others went to Prince Lvoff's official residence to arrest him and some of his colleagues, who were holding a council there. Their courage, however, failed them, and though there were no troops on guard there, the disloyal troops, on being invited to enter and talk to the Ministers, feared that a trap was being laid for them and contented themselves with requisitioning the Ministers' motor cars. . . .”

Cossacks were held in readiness by the Government, but were not actually used to restore order and the streets were full of crowds and troops engaged in faction fighting. On the following day, things looked blacker, for several thousand sailors arrived from Cronstadt, now a hotbed of Bolshevism—indeed,

Trotsky describes the Cronstadt sailors as the "fighting crusaders of the Revolution." There was another monster procession, and more street fighting. And Buchanan wrote thus :—

"On this Tuesday afternoon I really was afraid that the Government would have to capitulate, as they were really at the mercy of the disloyal troops, had the latter had an ounce of courage and been properly led. The Cossacks and a few loyal regiments who came out to protect the Government saved the situation. As it was, Tchernoff, the Socialist Minister of Agriculture, was roughly handled by the disloyal troops and temporarily arrested. While we were at dinner the Cossacks charged the Cronstadt sailors, who had gathered in the square by the Embassy, and sent them flying for their lives. The Cossacks then marched up the quay, but a little later got caught in a cross-fire and suffered heavy losses. We saw several riderless horses returning at full gallop, and a little later two Cossacks who were bringing back a prisoner were attacked by some soldiers under our windows and nearly murdered."

The despatch describes the further course of the disorders and how they were gradually got under. The next day, Wednesday, was comparatively quiet, and on Thursday the main bodies of mutinous troops were rounded up. Friday saw fresh sporadic outbreaks, and then a temporary calm supervened. Buchanan notes the close connection of this rebellion with the progress of the German campaign. He says :—

*Order
temporarily
restored*

"There can be no doubt that this co-called counter-revolution—a term which everybody inter-

prets in his own sense—was engineered by the Germans to synchronise with their offensive. The news of what was passing in Petrograd was circulated among the troops at the front by German aeroplanes and by Bolshevik agitators, and the collapse of the Russian Army would never have been so complete but for this. On the other hand, the Russian reverse—serious as it is, more especially from the point of view of the abandonment of heavy artillery, guns and military supplies—has secured for the Government the full support of the Soviet and of the Socialists, who have now given them full powers to put down indiscipline in the army and anarchy at home. . . .”

Buchanan was optimistic—unduly so, as events were to prove. He thought that this rebuff to the Bolsheviks would be permanent.

“It is always difficult in this country to look far ahead ; but in spite of the disastrous news from the front I take a more hopeful view of the situation as a whole than I have for some time past. Though the industrial, economic and financial situations are all serious, there is at last some prospect of orderly Government, even if a little time must elapse before we feel its effects. So long as anarchy reigned supreme one could not expect any real or lasting improvement, but the restoration of order ought to react favourably on all branches of the national life. . . .”

Unhappily, the restoration of order was far from being achieved. There was no stable foundation upon which it could be built. That scene of wild chaos on the 16th and 17th July which Buchanan has

so graphically described—leaderless mobs that seethed to and fro, insurgent troops marching to arrest members of the Government, street fighting and irresponsible murder—illustrated the state of Russia at the time. Except for the Cossacks, there was no force available that could be relied on to obey orders ; and on the side of the Government there was no one with the authority, vision and firm grasp needed for suppressing revolt and compelling unity and order. The only man in Russia strong enough for that task was on the other side.

Buchanan clearly recognised how much depended in this crisis upon the quality of leadership which might be forthcoming. He goes on in *Squabbles in the Government* his despatch to outline the form the reconstituted Government will take, and to comment on its prospective members :—

“ Tseretelli is apparently to be Minister of the Interior, but Terestchenko tells me that he is too much of an idealist for the post, and that he is not likely to retain it for long. Nekrassoff, who is to act as President of the Council when Kerensky is away, does not inspire confidence, as he is too much of an opportunist and has changed parties more than once in order to advance his own interests. His ambition is to become Prime Minister. He is, however, a capable and strong man. Of the other Socialist Ministers, Skobeleff and Tchernoff are the most influential. From all I hear the former is too flighty and not very intelligent, while the latter is said to be very able but quite untrustworthy. Prince Lvoff told a friend of mine yesterday that he regarded him as the most dangerous man in the revolutionary movement.”

Jealousies, rivalries and squabbings on the rim of the crater ! No wonder they fell in and dragged with them the cause they all cherished. How little these Girondists, all suspicious of each other, knew of the really dangerous men who were lying in wait for all of them ! They were under the impression that they had now disposed of Lenin and his mob of fanatics, and they only feared reformers in their own ranks—and the abler these were, the greater their distrust. They were jealous of the ambitions of Nekrassoff, alarmed at the socialist projects of Tchernoff. Soon they were broken by the ruthless directness of Lenin, the ruthless methods of Trotsky. The conclusion of our Ambassador's despatch tells of the movements that were being started in Russia to establish its future Government on the English model. He repeats a remark of Prince Lvoff to the effect that Russia would have a Constitutional Monarchy before the year was out. This struck Buchanan as symptomatic of that change of heart and revulsion against extreme Socialism which he hoped to see. He concluded that :—

“ We should have a monarchy again in a very few months if only there was any eligible candidate to the throne, and I do not know of anyone likely to command the suffrages of the nation.”

There was, in fact, such a man in Russia, and before long he was wielding a power more terrible than that of any Czar. But he was not a Romanoff. Neither Lvoff nor Buchanan had looked for a monarch among the Bolsheviks. Our Ambassador soon realised that Russia was not being swung in the direction of Constitutionalism.

On 4th August our Military Attaché wrote :—

“...The country is moving straight to ruin as things stand at present. During past fortnight no real steps have been taken to re-establish the prestige of the officers and discipline amongst troops in rear. Till discipline is established in rear and troops are made to fight it is impossible to look for any improvement in the army at the front. Till discipline is established in the army, it is impossible to force the men in the railway repair shops and the mines to work, and if they continue as at present, a general breakdown of railway transport in the winter and a famine at Petrograd and in the army will occur. Kerensky is at present the only man with any magnetic influence amongst the Ministry who has not yet understood the necessity of discipline.

None of his immediate military advisers are men of character. Socialists want to run a class war in preference to the race war, and this appeals to the mass of the soldiers as being less dangerous.

Tseretelli and others think they can run both wars simultaneously. We have to tell Russian Government plainly that this is impossible.”

And on the 6th came another telegram from him :—

“General Staff Officer complained apparently of coldness of England's attitude. He said that our opinion carries more weight than that of any other Ally. He suggested statement in Parliament of sympathy with Russia in her difficulties, with a delicate hint that, while we were ready to make any sacrifice to help Russia with a strong Government, our duty to ourselves and our other Allies

might make us question the advisability of helping a Government that delayed to take necessary steps to restore discipline."

On the 5th August, General Korniloff, an excellent soldier who for some months had been in disgrace as a result of his criticisms of the Government for being, as he thought, guilty of weakness in dealing with the Army, was reinstated as Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armies in the place of General Brusiloff. He was not *persona grata* in the eyes of the Soviet Government, who regarded him rather in the light of a counter-revolutionary, but on his appointment as Commander-in-Chief the attacks on him were modified. Kerensky agreed to give Korniloff a free hand.

Sir William Robertson said that he had great hopes that this appointment would lead to the restoration of discipline and the regeneration of the Russian Army. In spite of this, however, pessimistic reports continued to come from Petrograd, and we were told that it would be useless to expect any further military assistance from Russia in 1917. The Allies were attempting, with the aid of a technical Railway Mission from the United States, to reorganise the Russian railways, as the difficulties of transport in Russia seemed to be one of the chief causes of the trouble. But the Russian temperament is not, or at least was not in those days, helpful in putting things on a business basis. It turned out that the Mission, through no fault of its own, was utterly unable to cope with the situation. The pre-War Russian at his best never shone as an organiser. When he became inebriated with revolutionary sentiment

he was useless for the common tasks of an ordered society. Intoxication is no corrective for inefficiency.

At the Inter-Allied Conference on 8th August the Russian situation came up for discussion, and the following telegram was sent to the Russian Government :—

“ The Representatives of the Allied Governments met in London on 7th August greet with heartiest sympathy the bold effort of reorganisation which the Provisional Government and its leader are carrying on in Russia. They note with satisfaction that in this tragic hour all forces of Russia are consolidated around the Government to reinforce its power and that the popular will expressed from day to day in more definite forms and through a more complete representation, proclaims loudly the necessity of national defence.

They send their heartiest greeting to M. Kerensky and his colleagues and express firm confidence in their controlling authority and in the re-establishment of a strict discipline which is clearly indispensable to all armies, but above all to the armies of free nations. It is by discipline that the Russian Army will secure alike popular liberty, national honour and the realisation of the war aims which are common to all the Allies.”

On 7th September, however, the War Cabinet again reviewed the position, and considered an appeal for more guns for Russia. They decided that “ the supply of guns was part of the general question as to whether we were to continue to support Russia in view of the lack of discipline that prevailed in the

*Position in
September :
Knox's views*

Army of that country and the serious economic situation there." At this same Cabinet meeting General Knox, who had just returned from Russia, gave an account of the position in that distracted country. He said that :—

"... There were three powerful forces tending to drive the Russians to make a separate peace.

The great mass of the soldiers did not want to fight. They had not wanted to fight before the Revolution, but had been forced on by their officers. There had been frequent cases of indiscipline before the Revolution ; now they were quite general.

In the second place, workmen were making huge economic demands on their employers, and British manufacturers were closing factories and moving away. It was expected that there would shortly be a general lock-out. The workmen had probably enough money to last them for a month ; after that time, there would be a state of anarchy. The Government had repeatedly promised to organise a militia or police force in Petrograd and Moscow, but nothing had been done.

The third force was the confusion on the railways. There was an enormous surplus of grain in the Caucasus, but the level at which the price of bread had been fixed was not such as to tempt the peasants to part with their grain. Nor would cash purchases at high prices attract them. They preferred to barter grain for goods which they actually wanted, such as agricultural implements and calico.

Force would have to be applied if the grain was to be forthcoming. The harvest in the Volga governments had been a failure, and to bring the grain

from the Northern Caucasus and Western Siberia was very difficult owing to the condition of rolling stock. In June, 1916, 18 per cent. of the engines were under repair ; in June, 1917, 24 per cent.; and the number was increasing at the rate of 2 per cent. per week. The average number of days per month worked in some of the repairing shops was only 13. . . .

In reply to questions as to the likelihood of a *coup d'état*, headed by General Korniloff, General Knox said that he did not know what preparations were being made. When he left Russia, on the 18th August, Korniloff and Savinkoff were in agreement. Korniloff was a strong character, an honest patriot, and the best man in sight. He had the support of the Cossacks. They numbered 1,000 squadrons of 150 each. He (General Knox) had no faith in Kerensky. . . . Kerensky was afraid of shedding blood and was allowing matters to drift towards anarchy. A force of 10,000 loyalists would be enough to subdue Petrograd—the main source of disorder. . . . If Kerensky were to suggest a separate peace he would certainly have the great majority of the country with him. As to some of the prominent generals in Russia, Alexieff was a student of war and not suited to a crisis ; Brusiloff was a politician, Kaledin, the commander of the 8th Army, was one of the best generals, and had been chosen by the Cossacks of the Don as their Chief. . . .

In concluding his statement, General Knox strongly urged on the War Cabinet the importance of a joint representation from the Allied Governments, recommending to the Russian Government that in view of Russia's desperate situation and

the peril of putting back democracy, General Korniloff should be fully supported in the measures which he wished to take to restore discipline at the front, on the railways, and in Petrograd."

While these deliberations were going on, however, an open quarrel had broken out between Kerensky and Korniloff. The latter had been *Korniloff's rebellion and fall* roused to anger by Kerensky's procrastination in giving him powers, including the reimposition of the death penalty for disobeying orders, and had been persuaded to agree to an attempt to get himself proclaimed Military Dictator. Kerensky called upon him to resign, and Korniloff, assured of the support of the Commanders of all the Groups on the Western Frontier, raised the standard of revolt and appealed to the people in an order which ended thus :—

"I pledge you my word of honour as an officer and a soldier, and assure you once more that I, General Korniloff, the son of a simple Cossack peasant, have by my whole life, and not by words only, shown my unfailing devotion to my country and to freedom, that I am opposed to all counter-revolutionary schemes, and stand on guard over the liberties we have won, desiring only that the great Russian nation should continue independent."

The rebellion of Korniloff failed. Had he been successful in establishing a military dictatorship it is more than doubtful, in view of the complete disintegration of the army, whether it would have been helpful to the Allies. The stubborn qualities of the Russian peasant soldier, which gave him that endurance which made him formidable even in defeat, had

now been converted into a sulky and immutable resolve not to do any more fighting at anyone's bidding. Moreover, Korniloff's defiance of the Government was essentially an anti-Kerensky movement and for this reason the Allied Governments found themselves in an awkward position. The position was debated in the Cabinet on 12th September :—

“ . . . It was felt that, difficult though it was for the British Government to interfere in the present situation without appearing to take sides with General Korniloff, it was essential, in the interests of the Allies and of democracy generally, to make an effort to improve the situation, although it was realised that any steps in that direction would have to be taken through M. Kerensky, as he was the representative of the existing Government. It was suggested that he should be informed that the British Government viewed with the greatest alarm the probabilities of civil war, and urged him to come to terms with General Korniloff not only in the interest of Russia herself, but in that of the Allies.”

Events, however, delivered us from the dilemma of choosing between Kerensky and Korniloff, for Korniloff was denounced as a traitor and arrested. But Kerensky himself says *Kerensky's complaint* that though the Korniloff rebellion was crushed, it shook the authority of the Government, and weakened it sufficiently to give the Bolsheviks, who had suffered a temporary check in the summer, their chance. “ Without the Korniloff affairs,” says Kerensky, “ the crucifixion of Russian liberty on the Golgotha of Lenin's dictatorship would

have been impossible." I cannot help thinking that he is taking too sanguine a view of the efficacy of his own leadership. Men of his temperament are doomed to failure in revolutionary times. They cannot reconcile idealism with action. Statesmen who hesitate in quiet times often gain thereby a reputation for moderation and sagacity. But in a tumult they are a national calamity.

It was clear that Russia as a fighting force was falling to pieces. Austrian prisoners were being allowed to escape and return to their own lines; Russian roads were blocked with deserters. We had news in October that 59 third line Russian divisions were being disbanded.

The situation was now rapidly getting worse. By November, anarchy prevailed in Petrograd and severe fighting was taking place in Moscow. News came that "Kerensky was endeavouring himself to command three weak divisions of Cossacks, in the vicinity of Tsarskoe Selo, which place had been occupied by the Bolsheviks." The telegram adds :

Lenin and Trotsky overthrow Kerensky "The behaviour of M. Kerensky appeared to be lamentable and to give little hope of any success on his part." Lenin and Trotsky, both resolute men, marched on Petrograd and on 7th November overthrew the Kerensky Government with the greatest ease. Kerensky put up no fight. The Bolsheviks were in power.*

On 22nd November the War Cabinet discussed the question of their recognition :—

"... The difficulty was that any overt official step taken against the Bolsheviks might only

* For Trotsky's statement of Bolshevik Policy, see Appendix to this Chapter.

strengthen their determination to make peace, and might be used to inflame anti-Allied feeling in Russia, and so defeat the very object we were aiming at. Nor was anything known of the actual position which would justify us, at this juncture, in backing either Kaledin or any other leader of the party of law and order."

On 26th November a telegram came from General Knox to say that, apart from anything the Russian authorities might do, the Russian troops at the front were now insisting upon an armistice. "It appears quite clear," said Knox, "that whatever happens politically in Russia, the bulk of the Russian Army refuses to continue the War."

Co-operation between Russia and the rest of the Allies had gone by the board with the Bolshevik refusal to implement the London agreement of 1914. Trotsky demanded the release of Chicherin and Petroff, who were interned in England, and threatened reprisals against British subjects in Russia should these demands not be satisfied. A situation of the utmost complication was developing in our relations with Russia. Had the whole of Russia been under Bolshevik rule our course would have been clear. We should have treated with them as the *de facto* Russian Government. Had the Bolshevik leaders been the *de facto* Government, we could not have made war on them, or supported rebellion against their authority merely because they had made peace with Germany. But outside the towns—and they were not all Bolshevik—they had no authority. Vast portions of Russia were anti-Bolshevik, and Lenin's writ did not run over a third of the vast

*Russia
breaks with
the Allies*

Empire built up by the Romanoffs. The peasants who constituted 80 per cent. of the population were hostile or unconcerned. It was a revolution of the industrial workers in an agricultural country. The Cossacks of the Don were opposed to them. The Ukraine wished a Government of its own. The Caucasus was by no means Bolshevik. Neither was Siberia. These were facts of great moment to us. The parts of Russia which were not yet Bolshevised were its granaries and its oilfields and it was vital to us that these resources should not fall into the hands of the Germans either through conquest or by arrangement with Lenin and Trotsky. The difficulties Mr. Balfour and I experienced in persuading certain members of the Government to have any dealings with Petrograd which would involve recognition

*Peril of
Bolshevik
intrigues*

of the Bolsheviks were considerably enhanced by Trotsky's revolutionary appeal to all nations to rise against the rule of the "*Bourgeoisie*." That term became the standing phrase for anyone who possessed private property of any sort or description. There was a genuine fear that recognition would involve admitting into Allied countries a swarm of Bolshevik intriguers to foment revolution. The Home Office drew our attention to an article in the *Woolwich Pioneer* by M. Litvinoff, given under his official seal, inviting the munition workers of Woolwich to start a revolution. The War Office reported that he had also been endeavouring to tamper with the discipline of British troops, notably Russian Canadians. These were some of the difficulties confronting us when we came to consider the problem of recognition.

The Cabinet considered the situation on 29th

November. M. Trotsky had issued to the Military Attachés of Allied Powers, on 27th November, a note stating that he and his supporters were endeavouring to bring about a general and not a separate armistice, but that they might be driven to a separate armistice by the Allies if they refused to negotiate. If the Allied Governments would not recognise the Bolsheviks the latter would appeal to the peoples as against their Governments. Sir George Buchanan urged that a reply should be issued immediately to this "insolent communication," pointing out that Trotsky's proposal for a general armistice reached the British Embassy nineteen hours after the Commander-in-Chief had opened *pourparlers* with the enemy, and that the Allies were determined to continue the War until a permanent peace had been obtained. Sir George Buchanan further urged the Government that, as the situation was now desperate, it was advisable to set Russia free from her agreement with the Allies, so that she could act as she chose, and decide to purchase peace on Germany's terms or fight on with the Allies. In his opinion the policy of the Bolsheviks was to divide Russia and Britain, and so pave the way for what would virtually be a German protectorate over the former. The course he recommended, if adopted, would make it impossible for the Bolsheviks to reproach the Allies with driving Russian soldiers to slaughter for their Imperialist aims. In the telegram sent to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff the Military Attaché at Jassy proposed that, if it were found that Kaledin, a great Cossack Chief, was well-disposed to the Allies, a French and a British Mission, fully accredited, should be sent to his headquarters ; that

*Discussion in
the Cabinet*

Kaledin

financial support up to £10,000,000 should be guaranteed to Kaledin ; and, generally, that the British Mission should have full power to act without awaiting instructions from England.

The War Cabinet were informed that a message from Trotsky, addressed to the Ambassadors of Norway, Holland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Denmark, had been stopped by the Press Bureau. It asked that pressure should be brought to bear by the Socialist and working-class organisations in these countries in favour of peace.

Some members of the War Cabinet were impressed with the objections to the policy of entering into active co-operation with Kaledin without further information. Steps had been taken to obtain such information, but it had not yet been received. Little was definitely known of Kaledin's personality, and there were signs that the Cossacks were not prepared to fight. The scheme, on General Ballard's admission, was not one which could be regarded as hopeful, and its only result might be to drive the Russian Government definitely into the arms of Germany.

Alternative courses open were to follow Sir George Buchanan's advice or to wait a little longer in the hope that the situation would subsequently become clearer. In any case, we could not act alone ; the subject was one which should be referred to the conference now meeting in Paris.

But on the very day the Cabinet was discussing those communications Germany had accepted Lenin's offer of an armistice and Russian delegates crossed the German lines.

*Russian
Armistice
with Germany*

This Armistice altered fundamentally, to the detriment of the Allies, the whole military position in the West. Until it was signed

the Germans and Austrians could not withdraw any substantial portion of their army from the Eastern Front. Some of their best officers and men had been taken away to the West to fill up gaps in divisions depleted by the heavy fighting and inferior material had been sent to take their place on the Russian Front, but not many complete divisions had been withdrawn. There was still an element of doubt as to what the Russian Army might or might not do. It was known that the Kerensky Government was making great efforts to revive its fighting spirit and no one can forecast with certainty what direction a revolution may take. The Germans could not gamble on what would emerge out of chaos. Kerensky's efforts kept them guessing for months. That was a real service he rendered to the Allies. But as soon as he was swept out of power and his place taken by more resolute men, there could be no doubt that Russia meant to desert her Allies. France, Britain and Italy had to face a new and exceedingly dangerous situation. A power which had for three years absorbed millions of the best soldiers and thousands of the guns of the Central Powers had finally withdrawn from the fighting line. By the end of November the German strength on the Western Front had risen from 150 to 160 divisions. Other divisions were only awaiting transport.

At the Inter-Allied Conference in Paris which began on 30th November, I communicated to the representatives of the other Allies the proposal which had been put forward by Sir George Buchanan, that in view of the conditions in Russia, the Allies :—

*Paris
Conference
discusses the
position*

“ should release Russia from the engagement

entered into in the Pact of London not to make a separate peace, and that they should tell the Russian people that, realising the extent to which they are worn by war, and the effects of the disorganisation resulting from a great revolution, they would leave them to decide for themselves whether to obtain peace on Germany's terms, or fight on with their Allies who were determined not to lay down their arms until they had obtained guarantees for the world's peace."

After long discussions, in the course of which M. Clemenceau said that if Russia made a separate peace she would thereby betray us, and that, "if M. Maklakoff and all the celestial powers asked him to give Russia back her word, he would refuse," several draft messages were produced. In reference to Sir George Buchanan's suggestion of a joint declaration freeing Russia to make her own Peace, I suggested that each nation should tell its own Ambassador to let it be known in Russia that we were ready to discuss war aims. It should be left to the discretion of each Ambassador to let this be known in the way which he considered best. I pointed out that in view of the Russian retirement there was some case for discussing war aims. Consider Russia's war aims, for example. She had aspired to the control of Constantinople, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. What was the use of talking of that now? Much less was it possible to talk of the annexation of the Bukowina as a Russian war aim. It was, therefore, not for us to refuse reconsideration of our avowed war aims. At present the Russian war aims stood in the way of any separate peace with Turkey. It was decided that the representatives of

the Great Powers who were signatories of the Treaty of London, dated the 4th September, 1914, and those who have since adhered to this treaty, should declare that they were ready to proceed to the examination of the war aims and of the possible conditions of a just and durable peace in concert with Russia, as soon as a regular Government, having the right to speak in the name of the nation, should be established in Russia.

We had now to consider what our attitude should be in regard to the new Russian Government, which at its very best, would in future be in the position of a neutral towards the Allies.

The problem with which the British Government and indeed the Allies as a whole were faced, was a purely military one. We were not concerned with the internal political troubles of Russia as such. What we had to consider as a war problem was how best to prevent Germany from revictualling herself afresh from the corn lands and the oilfields which would be laid open to her if she succeeded in penetrating to the Don and the rich provinces of the Caucasus. It was for this reason, and not from any anti-Communist motives, that we decided to give support to the loyalist Russians who were in control of these fertile areas, and who were not prepared to desert the others. If the Central Powers should succeed in obtaining possession of the vast stores of Russian wheat and oil, so essential to their continued prosecution of the War not only for themselves but also their allies, it would mean the prolongation of the struggle, perhaps by years. We realised how vital a matter it was to Germany and Austria—in fact a matter indeed of life and death to their population—

*Allied attitude
to Russia*

and we had a conviction that every effort must be put to cut off the enemy from those supplies. The War Cabinet, therefore, discussed the need of organising the forces of resistance inside Russia. We examined the measures to be adopted to assist the anti-German formations which still existed in certain parts of Russia. The difficulty was to do so without appearing to wage war on the Bolshevik Government now established at Petrograd.

I had several discussions on the matter with the Foreign Secretary and we found ourselves in agreement as to the line to be taken. As there were members of the Government who were inclined to take up a strong anti-Bolshevik attitude, and Mr. Balfour was unable to attend the next meeting where our policy would be decided, I was anxious that his personal views should be communicated to his colleagues. I therefore asked him to embody the conclusions we had reached in a Memorandum for circulation to the Cabinet. It is one of Mr. Balfour's most notable State documents.

"NOTES ON THE PRESENT RUSSIAN SITUATION"

As I may not be able to be present at Cabinet to-morrow, I desire to make these notes.

The following points have to be specially
Mr. Balfour's kept in view :—
memorandum

1. The safety of our Embassy in Petrograd and of British subjects in Russia.
2. The interests of Roumania and her Army.
3. The best course to adopt in order to diminish as much as possible the advantage which Germany will be able to extract from the

dissolution of the Russian Army as a fighting force.

These subjects are all interconnected, though so far as possible I will deal with them separately.

(1) The greatest danger to Sir George Buchanan and the British colony arises probably out of the possibility of mob-violence, excited by the anti-British propaganda fomented by German money in Petrograd and elsewhere. The only real security against this is to be found either by the establishment of a strong and order-loving Government in Russia, or by the removal of the British, official and unofficial, to some safer country.

The first we can do nothing to secure. The second cannot be obtained unless we are able (a) to provide the necessary transport either through Sweden or through some northern port of Russia, and (b) to win the goodwill (in however qualified a form) of the present rulers of Petrograd.

The question of transport is hardly a Foreign Office matter, but the policy of avoiding the active malevolence of the Bolshevik Party raises most important diplomatic issues.

It was suggested at the Cabinet on Friday that, after their recent proclamations, the Bolsheviks could only be regarded as avowed enemies, and to treat them as anything else showed a lamentable incapacity to see facts as they are, and to handle them with decision.

I entirely dissent from this view and believe it to be founded on a misconception. If, for the moment the Bolsheviks show peculiar virulence in dealing with the British Empire, it is probably because

they think that the British Empire is the great obstacle to immediate peace ; but they are fanatics to whom the constitution of every State, whether monarchical or republican, is equally odious. Their appeal is to every revolutionary force, economic, social, racial, or religious, which can be used to upset the existing political organisations of mankind. If they summon the Mohammedans of India to revolt, they are still more desirous of engineering a revolution in Germany. They are dangerous dreamers, whose power, be it great or small, transitory or permanent, depends partly on German gold, partly on the determination of the Russian Army to fight no more ; but who would genuinely like to put into practice the wild theories which have so long been germinating in the shadow of the Russian autocracy.

Now, contrary to the opinion of some of my colleagues, I am clearly of opinion that it is to our advantage to avoid, as long as possible, an open breach with this crazy system. *No breach with Russia* If this be drifting, then I am a drifter by deliberate policy. On the broader reasons for my view, I will say a word directly, but its bearing on the narrower issue of the safety of Sir George Buchanan and the British colony is evident. I am personally of opinion that the Cabinet should reverse the decision it came to some little time ago and should deport to Russia the two interned Russian subjects* in whose fate the Russian rulers appear to be so greatly interested. I was not in England when the decision to retain them was come to, and I am imperfectly acquainted with the reasons for it. Doubtless they were

* Chicherin and Petroff.

sufficient. But I certainly think that we may now with advantage send these two Russians back to their own country, where, judged by local standards, their opinions will probably appear sane and moderate.

I have already instructed Sir George Buchanan to abstain completely from any action which can be interpreted as an undue interference with the internal affairs of the country to which he is accredited, and I am unable to think of any other step which would help to secure his safety.

(2) As regards the Roumanian Army, events have marched rapidly. Everything that could be done, even as a forlorn hope, has been done to enable the Army to join with other forces in Russia prepared to continue the struggle, but for the moment no such forces appear to exist, and the Roumanian Army is under the strictest military necessity of acquiescing in the Armistice, or rather the cessation of hostilities, on its part of the line. . . .

(3) I have already indicated my view that we ought, if possible, not to come to an open breach with the Bolsheviks or drive them into the enemy's camp. But there are wider reasons for this policy than the safety of the British colony in Russia. These wider reasons are as follows :—

It is certain, I take it, that, for the remainder of this war, the Bolsheviks are going to fight neither Germany nor anyone else. But, if we can prevent their aiding Germany we do a great deal, and to this we should devote our efforts.

There are two possible advantages which Germany may extract from Russia's going out of the War : (i) She may increase her man-power in

other theatres of operation by moving troops from Russian Fronts, or by getting back German prisoners. There is little hope of stopping this, and I say no more about it. (ii) She may obtain the power of using the large potential resources of Russia to break the Allied Blockade. I am not sure that this is not the more important of the two advantages, and it has so far been very imperfectly examined. As regards oil, we want to know what means of transport there is in the Black Sea available to the Germans, and how far the anti-Bolshevik elements in the Caucasian regions can be utilised to interfere with the supply on land. As regards cereals, the difficulties the Germans are likely to have arise mainly, I suppose, from the chaotic condition of the country, the disorganisation of all means of transport, and the determination of the Russians to use their own produce for their own purposes.

If we drive Russia into the hands of Germany, we shall hasten the organisation of the country by German officials on German lines. Nothing could be more fatal, it seems to me, both to the immediate conduct of the War and to our post-War relations.

Russia, however incapable of fighting, is not easily overrun. Except with the active goodwill of the Russians themselves, German troops (even if there were German troops to spare) are not going to penetrate many hundreds of miles into that vast country. A mere Armistice between Russia and Germany may not for very many months promote in any important fashion the supply of German needs from Russian sources. It must be our business to make that period as long as possible by

every means in our power, and no policy would be more fatal than to give the Russians a motive for welcoming into their midst German officials and German soldiers as friends and deliverers.

A. J. BALFOUR.

9th December, 1917."

I strongly supported the sagacious counsel given in this document. Mr. Balfour's views were not acceptable to several members of the *Cabinet decision* Government, but ultimately the Cabinet decided that His Majesty's Government was not primarily concerned with the composition of the Russian Government or with the local aspirations of the Bolsheviks or other political parties, except in so far as they bore on their attitude to our conflict with the Central Powers. This was the line we had taken during the Czar's reign, and there was no reason to depart from it. Our dominant purpose throughout the revolution should be :—

(a) If possible, to keep Russia in the War until our joint war aims were realised ; or

(b) If this could not be secured, then to ensure that Russia was as helpful to us and as harmful to the enemy as possible. For this purpose we should seek to influence Russia to give to any terms of peace that might be concluded with the enemy a bias in our favour.

This attitude, if successful, would have averted the worst disasters of Russian defection. It was difficult to foretell how strong the Bolsheviks might become, or how long their power might endure ; but if, as

seemed likely, they maintained an ascendancy for the next few months only, these months were critical, and to antagonise them needlessly would be to throw them into the arms of Germany. There were at the moment signs that within a few days, when the elections of the Constituent Assembly had been completed, the Bolsheviks would be installed in power not only in a *de facto*, but also in a constitutional sense, for a considerable part but by no means for the whole of Russia.

In this connection messages had been received from the British Embassy at Petrograd. The terms were given of a six months' Armistice proposed by the Bolsheviks, and it was stated that there was a remarkable change in the official Press, the Allies not being attacked for the first time for several weeks.

*Terms of
Russian
Armistice*

In *The Times* of that day there appeared a report that the Germans were making the following conditions :—

- (a) Germany to obtain, for fifteen years, a control of the Russian wheat market ;
- (b) Importation into Russia of all German goods duty free.
- (c) No territory now occupied by German troops to be surrendered.

Attention was also drawn to a telegram to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, dated the 5th December, 1917, recounting a private and unofficial interview with Krilenko, the Bolshevik Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army, during which he said that he had issued an order that all Armistice agreements should contain a clause

forbidding transfer of troops from one front to another. He appeared most anxious to make a favourable impression on Allied officers and had carried out all suggestions made to him for safeguarding the lives of officers and their families. In a telegram dated the 6th December, 1917, Sir George Buchanan reported an interview between Captain Smith and

*Problem of
British in
Russia*

Trotsky, at which the prohibition of British subjects leaving Russia was discussed in connection with the detention in this country of Messrs. Chicherin and Petroff. Trotsky denied that the prohibition was intended as a threat. His object had been to emphasise the difference between the treatment accorded to Russian subjects in the United Kingdom and British subjects in Russia. On publication in the local Press of a *communiqué* to the effect that the British Government would reconsider the cases of all Russian subjects interned in Great Britain and would give facilities for return to their country of all Russians innocent of any offence punishable by the laws of Great Britain, he (Trotsky) would the same day restore full liberty of movement to all British subjects in Russia. Sir George Buchanan urged His Majesty's Government to agree to accept the compromise proposed by Trotsky, otherwise he feared that British subjects would be held up indefinitely.

The Cabinet accepted the Ambassador's advice and released the two Russians.

The making of peace between Russia and Germany was a somewhat protracted affair. Trotsky had on 22nd December, 1917, put forward terms for a general peace which were plausible. They were as follows.

*Trotsky's
peace
proposals*

1. No forcible annexations of territory taken during the War.

2. Complete restoration of independence to the nationalities who had lost it during the War.

3. Nationalities not hitherto enjoying independence to have the right to decide by plebiscite whether they would be united to other States or acquire independence.

4. Safeguarding of the rights of minorities in territories inhabited by several nationalities.

5. No war indemnities, but war requisitions to be returned.

6. Colonial acquisitions to be decided on the same principles. Economic war was condemned by the Russians.

Count Czernin, the Austrian Premier, in his reply to the Russian overtures on 25th December, delivered a speech which accepted the suggestion of a general peace and as far as phraseology was concerned seemed to concede all that we were fighting for. On closer examination of its terms its language was nebulous and ambiguous. None of our specific demands were conceded, although they appeared all to be covered. It was essential that we should ascertain what his utterance meant when we came to practical details. To enter into negotiations on the basis of vague formulæ embodied in a speech delivered by a statesman from a country that was not in a position to settle the issue of peace or war, would be to walk into an unknown territory in a mist. Germany had said nothing. We must therefore come to grips with the realities of the problem. We could only do that by stating in the frankest and clearest language

*Vague reply
of Central
Powers*

what were our war aims. I came to the conclusion that the time had arrived when that should be done. The interpretation placed upon Czernin's vague expressions in subsequent speeches by German statesmen and the military chiefs and also the practical application given to them in the Brest-Litovsk Treaty amply justified our caution.

On the 21st we again discussed the situation. It was decided to send Lord Milner and Lord Robert Cecil to Paris to confer with the French Government as to the attitude we should adopt in view of the Bolshevik peace overtures with Russia. After a full consideration by the Cabinet of the line they ought to take, they proposed the following Memorandum for submission to the French :—

*British
Memorandum
submitted
to French
Government*

“ At Petrograd we should at once get into relations with the Bolsheviks through unofficial agents, each country as seems best to it.

We propose to send Sir George Buchanan on leave for reasons of health, but we shall keep a Chargé d’Affaires there. We do not suggest that our Allies should follow our example. Sir George Buchanan’s long residence in Petrograd has indelibly associated him, in the minds of the Bolsheviks, with the policy of the Cadets, and he stands to them for much the same as, say, M. Miliukoff.

We should represent to the Bolsheviks that we have no desire to take part in any way in the internal politics of Russia, and that any idea that we favour a counter-revolution is a profound mistake. Such a policy might be attractive to the autocratic Governments of Germany and

Austria, but not to the Western democracies or America. But we feel it necessary to keep in touch as far as we can with the Ukraine, the Cossacks, Finland, Siberia, the Caucasus, etc., because these various semi-autonomous provinces represent a very large proportion of the strength of Russia. In particular, we feel bound to befriend the Ukraine, since upon the Ukraine depends the feeding of the Roumanians, to whom we are bound by every obligation of honour.

As for the War, we should carefully refrain from any word or act condoning the treachery of the Russians in opening peace negotiations with our enemies. But we should continually repeat our readiness to accept the principles of self-determination, and, subject to that, of no annexation or indemnities. We should press on the Bolsheviks the importance of not being satisfied with empty phrases from the Germans, and point out that unless they get specific undertakings from them as to such questions as Poland, Bohemia, the Roumanian parts of Transylvania, not to speak of Alsace-Lorraine and the Trentino, they will get nothing. Meanwhile their powers of resistance are melting away, and they will soon be, if they are not now, at the mercy of the German Kaiser, who will then snap his fingers at all their fine phrases and impose on them any terms he pleases. They should be told that it is now probably too late to do anything to save the personnel of the Army. But the material of the artillery can still be preserved, and at the very least it should not be transferred to our enemies to be used against the Western democracies. Most important of all, the Bolsheviks should prevent, if they can, the

wheat districts of Russia, such as the Ukraine, falling into the control of or being made available for the Central Powers. This makes another reason why we are anxious to support and strengthen the Ukraine and why we urge on the Bolsheviks that, so far from trying to coerce the Ukrainians, they should enter into close co-operation with them.

In Southern Russia our principal object must be, if we can, to save Roumania. Next we must aim at preventing Russian supplies from reaching Germany.

Finally, we are bound to protect, if possible, the remnant of the Armenians, not only in order to safeguard the flank of our Mesopotamian forces in Persia and the Caucasus, but also because an Armenian, united, if possible, with a Georgian, autonomous, or independent State, is the only barrier against the development of a Turanian movement that will extend from Constantinople to China, and will provide Germany with a weapon of even greater danger to the peace of the world than the control of the Baghdad Railway.

If we could induce the Southern Russian armies to resume the fight, that would be very desirable, but it is probably impossible. To secure these objects the first thing is money to reorganise the Ukraine, to pay the Cossacks and Caucasian forces, and to subsidise the Persians. The sums required are not, as things go, very enormous, but the exchange presents great difficulties. If the French could undertake the finance of the Ukraine, we might find the money for the others. It is understood that the United States will assist. Besides

finance, it is important to have agents and officers to advise and support the provincial Governments and their armies. It is essential that this should be done as quietly as possible so as to avoid the imputation—as far as we can—that we are preparing to make war on the Bolsheviks.

We would suggest that the Ukraine should be again, in this matter, dealt with by the French, while we would take the other south-east provinces. A general officer from each country would be appointed to take charge of our respective activities, but they would, of course, keep in the closest touch with one another through carefully selected liaison officers in order to ensure the utmost unity of action.

It is for consideration whether we should facilitate the return to Southern Russia of the numerous Russian officers at present in France and England."

This Memorandum was accepted by M. Clemenceau and M. Pichon on 23rd December. Difficulties subsequently arose, however, between the Bolsheviks and the Germans, and the Brest-Litovsk negotiations were interrupted.

Our own attitude towards the Bolshevik Government at this time was not easy of definition. On 17th January, 1918, Mr. Balfour expressed to the War Cabinet the opinion that from a purely Foreign Office point of view there would be great advantages in cutting off all relations with the Bolsheviks. The latter had broken their treaty with the Allies, had repudiated their debts to us, and were openly trying to raise

*British
attitude in
January, 1918*

revolutions in all countries. The Italian Government were anxious that this course should be taken. On the other hand, we still had great interests in Northern Russia, and a number of British subjects there whose position had to be considered. It was, therefore, necessary that communications of a practical kind should take place through agents. He was quite clear that we could not give full recognition to the Bolsheviks until they could show that they were representative of the Russian people.

Mr. Balfour then read a reply given on the previous day in the House of Commons to questions put by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and others, which was as follows :—

*Balfour's
statement*

“ . . . We have not recognised that Administration as being *de facto* or *de jure* the Government of the Russian people, but we carry on necessary business in an unofficial manner through an agent acting under the direction of our Embassy at Petrograd.

The Bolshevik Administration have appointed M. Litvinoff as their representative in London, and we are about to establish similar unofficial relations with him.

M. Nabokoff, who was the Chargé d’Affaires under the late Republican Russian Government, will presumably remain in London until he is either confirmed or superseded in his post by a Government recognised as representing the Russian people.

The present arrangement is obviously both irregular and transitory. Though it cannot be fitted into any customary diplomatic framework,

it is, in our opinion, the best that can be devised to meet the necessities of the moment."

Subsequently, on 22nd January, in setting forth his views on our Russian relations, he made a statement which showed that he, as well as the rest of us, was torn between conflicting considerations. He said that :—

" In view of recent events in Petrograd, it was necessary for the War Cabinet to consider very seriously what our relations were to be with the Bolshevik Government. We were the only Allied nation that had admitted a Bolshevik representative ; in fact, he gathered that we were the only nation to whom the Bolsheviks had appointed a representative. No formal recognition had been given, but the necessary business was transacted through an agent, namely, Mr. Leeper. The main difficulty was that the Bolsheviks would not in the least mind quarrelling with us ; they think that they have nothing to gain by keeping on good terms with England. It was a question, therefore, whether the Bolsheviks would commit some act which would provoke a rupture. He, personally, was inclined to the view that we should postpone a rupture as long as possible, as it was quite clear that the Bolsheviks provided the Germans with more difficulties than would be presented by the Social Revolutionaries. From the point of view of postponing a separate peace between Russia and Germany, and stopping the Germans getting supplies out of Russia, it would appear that the Bolsheviks were more likely to effect such a policy than any other party in Russia.

The Bolsheviks, however, appeared determined to spread what he described as 'passionate propaganda' in this country, and also in Germany. He had been informed by Mr. Leeper that the Bolsheviks are convinced that social and political conditions in Germany are very bad, and that internal trouble is inevitable in the near future. This information is given them by one Radek, an international Jew of the same type as Trotsky, who is in close touch with the German Socialist Parties. Two views were current regarding Trotsky ; one view was that he was in the pay of the Germans, and was playing the German game ; the other view, which seemed the more probable, was that he was a genuine fanatic bent on spreading the doctrines of revolution throughout the world, but particularly in the two countries which he regarded as Imperialistic, viz. England and Germany."

Sir George Buchanan stated that he had always advocated a policy which would prevent an open breach with the Bolsheviks. On the other hand, it was clear that we should, sooner or later, have to choose between a rupture and complete reciprocity in everything. For instance, if we did not allow M. Litvinoff to send cypher telegrams, Trotsky would stop our representatives in Petrograd from sending cypher telegrams. Sir George said he would sooner see a rupture than allow Bolshevik propaganda on a large scale in this country, as such propaganda was dangerous, and attractive to those who had nothing to lose. He thought it was clear that the Germans would like to see a rupture between us and the Bolsheviks, and

*Buchanan's
view*

would like our representatives at Petrograd to be withdrawn, in order to give them a clear field. Any steps towards recognition by us would be exploited by the Bolsheviks in their own interests. Regarding the Social Revolutionaries, he thought that, although more correct in their methods, they were less of a nuisance to the Germans. The Social Revolutionaries had no backbone, and were, if anything, more anxious than the Bolsheviks to make a separate peace with Germany. Two things tended to cause him to modify his view that we should, if possible, avoid a rupture with the Bolsheviks, namely, the recent maltreatment of the Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks, and secondly, the possibility of the Japanese or Americans, or both, giving effective military assistance to those elements in Southern Russia who were inclined to resist the Bolsheviks. In any event, he thought that the Bolsheviks would not ask us for assistance.

I sought the opinion of General Knox regarding the military situation in Russia, and the possibility of preventing the Germans from obtaining food and other supplies from Southern Russia. He thought that, even assuming a separate peace, it would be fully six months before the Germans could obtain anything important from Southern Russia. However, after six months they could obtain practically all their requirements, which would in effect break down the blockade. The only way to prevent this eventuality was the creation in Southern Russia of some effective force to resist German force. As regards the land, very little sowing had been done on landlords' property in South Russia, which meant that, unless the Germans could organise and get possession

*Knox on
military
situation*

of this land before April, very little surplus corn would be available for export from Russia. The district of real importance was the Donetz coal basin, and whoever had effective possession of this was in a position to hold up the transport and resources of practically the whole of Russia, but the high prices which the Germans would offer would draw grain to enemy countries rather than to North Russia. A number of Russian officers had spoken to him in Petrograd with regard to the possibility of joining General Kaledin. As long, however, as we appeared to be giving any form of recognition or support to the Bolsheviks, it was not likely that they would take this step. Our dealings with the Bolsheviks undoubtedly decreased the effectiveness of the moral and material support we were giving to the Cossacks.

The information which we received from the Intelligence Department of the War Office was that it would appear that the Russian Armies
*Russian
Armies
disappearing* were rapidly melting away. The Germans were advancing towards Pskoff, without meeting any form of resistance. Sixty per cent. of the Baltic Fleet had deserted, and even on the Roumanian Front the Russian troops were being evacuated at the rate of 12 full trains a day, leaving material and guns behind. As to the available resources in Southern Russia, a man who had been in the Ukraine as recently as last October had informed him that there were large quantities of cattle in that part of Russia.

Mr. Bruce Lockhart, our representative in Petrograd, kept us in touch with the situation, and on February 7th there was a discussion in the Cabinet as to our attitude towards the Bolsheviks.

Mr. Balfour adhered to the view he had already expressed in his Memorandum.

I expressed the opinion that it was no concern of the British Government what Socialist experiment or what form of government the Bolsheviks were trying to establish in Russia. In regard to the particular question before us, it was necessary to bear in mind that the Bolsheviks were a formidable menace to Austria and Germany, and that our information regarding the internal conditions in Austria was such as to encourage the view that the internal political conditions of that Empire were seriously embarrassed by the spread of Bolshevism. I had no fear that Bolshevism was a formidable menace to the internal peace of this country. The recent by-election at Prestwich in Lancashire showed that, even in an industrial constituency, the vast majority of the nation were opposed to revolutionary ideas and in favour of carrying on the national war to a successful issue. I therefore thought that the grant of fuller authority to Mr. Lockhart might prove a useful opportunity for getting certain conditions agreed to by the Bolshevik Government in regard to their non-interference in the internal politics of Allied countries. I was also most anxious that the War Cabinet should not refuse the advice tendered to them by the British representatives in Russia, and I instanced several cases in the past where I thought errors had been made in refusing to accept such advice. The opinion I had formed of Mr. Lockhart was such as to cause me to hesitate before rejecting any advice he offered.

Some members of the Government viewed with considerable misgiving any dealings with the Bolshevik

Government which would enhance its prestige and thus increase its propagandist influence.

The War Cabinet requested the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to prepare a draft reply to Mr.

Lockhart's telegram, for their further consideration. Mr. Balfour's draft, as

*Despatch
to Lockhart*

approved by the Cabinet and dispatched to Petrograd, was in the following

terms :—

“ It would appear that there is some degree of misunderstanding in regard to our policy *vis-à-vis* the Petrograd Government. It is a mistake for you to suppose that we are ‘ disinclined to take the line of a qualified recognition of the Bolsheviks,’ and no less a mistake to fancy that our decision in this matter is influenced by ‘ anxiety as to the injury that might be inflicted on the Bourgeois elements in Russia by such a course.’ I must state clearly and emphatically in regard to this second point that we are in no way concerned with the internal affairs of Russia as such ; our sole interest in them is how they affect the War. Should it be the case that extensive areas of the country at present favour the Bolshevik form of Socialism, that is the concern not of Britain but of Russia, and it does not seem to us to have anything to do with the issue of whether we recognise the Russian Government diplomatically.

My opinion in regard to ~~this~~ ^{the} matter is that there is no material difference, as regards the form of recognition to be accorded, between the view you have cabled and that which His Majesty's Government holds. We both agree that at the moment it is impossible to accord full and complete

recognition, and most undesirable to make a complete rupture. The precise nature of the intermediate course to be adopted is the only problem. Provided it is understood that our diplomatic relations are no more than informal and semi-official, there appears to be no reason why you should not function as the British Embassy's acknowledged representative. With the *de facto* Bolshevik Government at Petrograd we are prepared to enter into relations in just the same way as we have done with the *de facto* Governments of the Ukraine, Finland and elsewhere.

But greater difficulties arise as regards the lines on which you should conduct your conversation with M. Trotsky. Naturally we do not want at the present time to spend time discussing past grievances such as the broken treaties, the debts repudiated, the military stores abandoned, the outbreak of war with Roumania, etc., but dealing merely with the present and the future, we note certain basic issues in regard to which we cannot meet the wishes of the Bolsheviks nor they ours. We desire that they should refrain from Bolshevik propaganda in the territories of the Allies. And they wish us to refuse aid or encouragement to any military or political movement in Russia of which they disapprove. The former demand would involve the abandonment by the Bolsheviks of their loudly advertised principles, while the latter would compel us to leave in the lurch our Allies and friends in those parts of Russia where the *de facto* government is not Bolshevik.

Apart from these, however, there are numerous important matters in regard to which there would

be valuable scope for judicious diplomacy. For the moment the first of these is to persuade the Petrograd Government against making a separate peace with Germany, and to get them to cease their hostility to Roumania. Direct efforts to stop peace with Germany would very likely defeat the end in view, but it would help matters to point out that the Germans will be more stubborn on questions of the freedom of Esthonia and Lithuania while they are without anxiety about the Roumanian border. It is our earnest wish to postpone as long as we can a break with the Petrograd Government—even if in the end a break cannot be avoided—and to make our semi-official dealings with them in the meantime pleasant and businesslike. So we agree to your suggestion that from now on you shall have the status of a recognised intermediary acting for us. We lay down no conditions for authorising this, because we shall reach a hopeless *impasse* the moment we start discussing conditions. As far as we can, we shall check Bolshevik propaganda in this country ; and if agents of the Bolsheviks are guilty of outrageous conduct we shall deport them, in the same way as we should treat representatives of any other Government that started interfering with our internal affairs. Trotsky will no doubt adopt the same attitude ; but if he wants us to terminate our relations with the Cossacks and the Caucasus, he will first have to prove that the *de facto* Government in those regions is Bolshevik.

I am certain, in the last place, that there is one matter on which we agree, whatever our differences. Both the Bolsheviks and ourselves want to bring about the end of militarism in Central Europe.

That being so, there will doubtless be questions of policy on which it will be possible for us to co-operate, and on which invaluable aid can be diplomatically rendered by you. For example, Trotsky might refuse Germany any supplies that would help her to prolong the War, or strengthen the efforts of the militarists to suppress any movements for a democratic peace on the part of the people at large.

We will for our part wait for suggestions from him as to what is the best we can do in such circumstances to help, with necessary supplies and in other directions."

But after many vicissitudes, peace was signed between Russia and Germany on 3rd March, 1918. A treaty had already been signed between the Central Powers and the Ukraine on 9th February. Roumania, pitifully situated, had no other alternative but to make peace, which she did on 27th February.

On 12th March, however, President Wilson thought fit to send a message expressing sympathy with the people of Russia on the occasion of the opening of the Congress of Soviets at Moscow.

*Wilson's
greeting to
Bolsheviks*

It was pointed out (in the Cabinet) that this document did on behalf of the United States exactly what Mr. Lockhart had urged the British Government to do. The American public, however, had not the same cause for resentment against Russia as the European Allies, who had made great investments in Russia, and who had been deserted in the midst of the struggle.

But when the full text of the Peace Terms became

known to us, the attitude of the Allies took a more definite and homogeneous form, and the question of

Our disgust at Peace Terms this final betrayal by Russia of her Allies was the subject of a political conference of the Allies in London on 16th March.

It was decided to issue a declaration expressing their indignation and M. Clemenceau prepared and read to the conference a draft. After substituting the word "Entente" for "Supreme War Council"—since it was pointed out, much to M. Clemenceau's disgust, that President Wilson objected to intervention by the Supreme War Council in political matters—the draft was substantially adopted.

Protest by Supreme War Council On 18th March, the statement drafted by the most mordant pen in Europe was issued on behalf of the Allies, protesting against the Russo-German Treaty. It did not lack vigour. It ended by a repudiation of the Treaty itself.

" . . . Peace treaties such as these we do not, and cannot, acknowledge. Our own ends are very different ; we are fighting, and mean to continue fighting, in order to finish once for all with this policy of plunder, and to establish in its place the peaceful reign of organised justice.

As the incidents of this long War unroll themselves before our eyes, more and more clearly do we perceive that the battles for freedom are everywhere interdependent ; that no separate enumeration of them is needed ; that in every case the single but all-sufficient appeal is to justice and right.

Are justice and right going to win? In so far as the issue depends on battles yet to come, the

nations whose fate is in the balance may surely put their trust in armies which, even under conditions more difficult than the present, showed themselves more than equal to the great cause entrusted to their valour."

APPENDIX

TROTSKY'S STATEMENT OF BOLSHEVIK POLICY

THE power of the Soviet is the power of the workers and peasants and soldiers ; and remember that the soldiers are simply the self-same workers and peasants. This is the first really large-scale trial of Government by the labouring masses. Till now the Government of a country was simply an instrument of power wielded by a small section which possessed everything over a large part which possessed nothing. Our plan is to form a Government based on the power of the larger mass of the people, which larger mass is now freeing itself from the oppression of the small mass. Government by the small mass has so far generally caused poverty and misery to the larger mass. The Soviet is the main organ of this new power in the centre and provinces of Russia.

Our programme is dictated by the interests of workers and peasants. Peace is essential to them. The power of our Soviet is an instrument for fighting for peace. In this fight for peace we are not reckoning on the goodwill of the bourgeois and its diplomacy, but on the pressure of the people. No official or semi-official patriotic lie can screen the fact that the labouring masses in all the warring countries are revolutionised to the very depths by this disgraceful slaughter, which does no more than show up the criminal character of capitalistic rule. The masses in all the countries hate the War and those who caused the War.

Revolution broke out first in Russia only for the reason that the machinery of Government was weaker in Russia than in other countries. But the War has in all countries caused an accumulation of revolutionary yearnings in the very depths of mankind, and revolution will break out earlier than is expected by the ruling parties of Europe. The plan of our universal policy is to give a push to the revolution in the centre and on the west of Europe. This is the real road to a democratic peace.

What about Belgium? Alsace-Lorraine? We did not at the commencement of the War believe, and we do not believe now, that the War is carried on by the ruling class for the sake of guarding the rights of weak nations. No! The bourgeois of all countries are fighting for property. If it could be imagined that the War will pass without punishment to the ruling classes, and that imperialism will remain the guiding hand in politics of so-called civilised people, it would be naive to think of the defending of weak and backward nations. Imperialism took everything and made slaves of everybody. Only the undefeated revolution of the working classes against imperialism can free Belgium, Alsace-Lorraine, and all weaker countries.

We are convinced that the German peoples who are now shedding their own blood, will not allow the German ruling-class officers to attack revolutionary Russia. We are sure there will be a temporary peace on all fronts. But if (though we find it impossible to imagine this) against our straight and open proposition of immediate democratic peace, the German people remain passive and the German Kaiser moves his armies against us, our Army will defend itself to the last drop of blood, because it is

not now a question of an imperialistic war, but it is the question of guarding the revolution, which offers peace to everybody.

We have given over the land of Russia from the landowner to the peasant, and the peasant will not pay anything for it.

We are placing a workers' control over production, with the object of gradually changing over the basis of production from capitalistic on to socialistic lines.

We are nationalising all banks, with the object of making one national bank. In these matters we shall act fearlessly and without pity, overcoming the resistance of landowners and capitalists who do not wish to give up their privileges without a fight.

Our plans are colossal, difficult, grandiose, but the strength of the people, opened up by the revolution, will overcome all difficulties and fulfil its ideals.

L. TROTSKY,
Smolny Institute.

3rd November, 1917.

CHAPTER LXXII

THE PROBLEM OF MAN-POWER

I. THE OUTLOOK FOR 1918

At the beginning of the War there were in round figures about nine million men of military age (between 19 and 50) in Great Britain, *British recruiting achievements in the War* and roundly a further million reached military age in the course of the War. Meantime, of course, several hundred thousand passed beyond the military age limit; but altogether there were about ten million men who at one time or another during the War were of military age. Of these ten million, it may be estimated that approximately six million were fit for general service.

Before conscription came into force, at the end of May, 1916, there were serving with our naval and military forces, apart from those of the Dominions and India, just over four million of these men. Between then and the end of the War a further two million men joined the armed forces of the country. This included men who had already attested before conscription was enforced but had not been called up, and it also included some men who were not qualified for the "A" category and were used for service behind the lines. It is worth noting that fully two out of three of the men who

joined our forces from the population of this island during the Great War, to fight for their country, were volunteers, not conscripts. Altogether, upwards of six million men from Great Britain served at one time or other with the forces of the Crown in the Great War, a total roughly corresponding with the number of fit men of military age in the Kingdom. While there were some fit men retained throughout the period of the War in civilian occupations, because they were judged to be of greater value to the nation's war effort there than they would have been in the Army or Navy, numbers of men not fit for general service were drawn into the forces for auxiliary work, thus redressing the balance.

These figures show that in the course of the War the nation put forth its full strength, and made the most thorough use of its available man-
Full strength put forth power. Nearly every fit man of military age served with our Forces, while the remainder of the male population, and a large part of the female population, undertook some form of work designed to aid the war effort.

When the Man-power Committee of the Cabinet made its investigation of our remaining man-power resources in December, 1917, this process had been very nearly carried out to the full during 1917 under the auspices of the special department instituted for that purpose, and the margin which they
Supply nearing exhaustion by end of 1917 then found available for further exploitation was meagre in the extreme. They prefaced their report with the statement that the drain on the robust manhood of the country which it had been foreseen that the War would impose was now no longer prospective but actual. We

were not the only belligerent country that found itself in that predicament. All had used up their man-power to the last limit of exhaustion. I maintain that we made a more prudent distribution of our resources than any of our partners or foes. We acted on the assumption that staying power was what mattered most. Had we not taken that view the Allies would have collapsed before America had time to come to the rescue.

Viewed through the eyes of military historians and controversialists the problem of man-power seems to have been a very simple one. Here were so many millions of young men in Britain fit for soldiering. There were too many to send simultaneously to the War, but all who were at first left behind would be reserved for the inevitable wastage. Our behind-the-line warriors could not understand the parsimony with which a niggardly and unsympathetic civilian Government doled out recruits when there was still a remnant of unspent manhood left at home to pursue their ordinary avocations. Their minds were bogged in the ideas and traditions of a bygone age when war conditions were so essentially different from those of this mechanical era. There was a time in the past when a nation's total wartime man-power was reckoned by counting all men of any age who could carry a spear or wield a sword and endure the hardships of a campaign. Most of the arms and munitions used in battle were carried by the men who employed them. A few carts would bring along all the reserve of javelins that were needed. Much of the siege artillery was improvised from material available in the forests and the army lived on the country through which it passed. The latest

*Military
attitude to
man-power
problem*

examples of such an army were the Boer Commandoes in the South African War. The farmer took up his rifle, filled and put on his bandolier, packed his saddle bag with biltong, had a few Cape carts for a reserve of cartridges and food, and thus equipped he and his followers became an army that held up the British Empire for over two years. In ancient wars the requirements of the population at home were very simple. Old men, with the help of women and children, could plough the land, harvest the crops and mind the cattle. At sea one has only to compare the requirements of the fleet of small wooden ships that fought the Armada with our monster steel ships and the thousands of craft, great and small, that guarded our communications. Even in 1918 there were responsible military leaders whose ideas about man-power were unconsciously governed by this primitive conception of warfare.

But to any Government responsible to the nation for the successful prosecution of a protracted and exhausting war under modern conditions, *Complex task of Government* the problem of how to make the best disposition of our national man-power was much more complex. We had not only to provide and keep supplied the immense equipment of modern armies and navies, but to administer and conserve our highly developed national life and activities at home. We were responsible for maintaining the whole war effort of the nation, military, naval, commercial, industrial, financial, diplomatic, and to a large extent for sustaining the effort of our Allies. To carry out that wide range of tasks, our dwindling man-power had to be husbanded and carefully allotted among these conflicting claims. All had to go short of the supply they

desired, and to carry on as well as they could with such resources as could be spared to them. Every nation was profligate of its man-power in the early stages of the war and consequently *Military squandermania* ducted its war activities as if there were no limit to the number of young men of military age who were fit to be thrown into the furnace to feed the flames of war. The Allies, who had an enormous superiority in the number of fit young men available, nearly threw away their advantage by the reckless prodigality of their military leaders. The German tactics had a more constant regard than the Allied military methods to the importance of winning without wasting valuable lives. Had they emulated Allied heedlessness in this respect they would have been broken by sheer exhaustion before the end of 1916. The British and French casualties on the Western Front were twice as heavy as the German losses. Russia lost three times as heavily as did her German assailants. The idea of a war of attrition was the refuge of stupidity and it was stupidly operated, with the consequence that the overwhelming superiority in man-power which the Allies enjoyed at the beginning of the War had by the fourth year been melted down to the dimensions of a dubious equality. For this reason, had America not come in at the last moment of exhaustion, the event of the War would have been different. We might not have been beaten, but we should have had to accept a deadlock solution.

The British man-power problem differed in some essential respects from that of our Allies. In a special measure we had to carry the burden of maintaining, not ourselves alone, but our Allies as well.

The command of the seas, without which Allied victory would have been impossible, was preponderatingly our charge, and our Navy had the supreme task of keeping the seas clear, hunting down the German submarines, holding the enemy warships pinned to their harbours, and convoying the merchant shipping which bore supplies not only for ourselves but for our Allies. The French and Italian Fleets made their contribution to this work, but compared with ours it was insignificant, and involved no serious drain on the man-power of those two countries. Men were needed not only for the manning of our immense Navy and Mercantile Marine, but for the building of new ships and swarms of new craft to patrol the sea, and to keep these constantly repaired and refitted. There was a difference equivalent to several army corps between the numbers absorbed by the manning and equipment of our naval and mercantile marine and those employed by France, Italy, Russia or Germany in the same tasks. The occupation of the corn-growing and cattle-rearing plains of Northern France by the Germans deprived Frenchmen of a large proportion of their wheat and meat resources. Without our ships, neither Italy nor France could have carried on for a single year. They would have been starved into surrender. Nor could we have conveyed our troops and theirs—including American troops—to the various theatres of war and maintained them there. But the manning of our naval and mercantile fleets, the provision of men for their docks, their building and repairing yards, their arming and munitioning, for the maintenance of minelayers and minesweepers and of the

*Non-military
demands on
British
man-power*

*Importance of
sea-power*

endless contrivances invented to fight the deadly submarine—all these demands in the aggregate absorbed well over a million of our man-power. If the men of military age and fitness amongst these were counted, it would be the equivalent of at least 30 divisions. There is no greater proof of the exclusiveness of a profession than the fact that great soldiers of exceptional intelligence like General Foch could never understand how essential sea-power was to the very existence of the alliance. Nelson taught Napoleon his first lesson in the importance of sea-power at the Battle of Aboukir. The isolation of Napoleon's Army from its sources of reinforcement and supply brought home to him the sinister possibilities which lurked in the sea for the schemes of a captain of land forces. And in the years which followed he was given many more warnings of the difficulty of overcoming a foe that ruled the waves. But it was never

Foch's limited comprehension impressed on the mind of Foch by any drawback or deficiency. He never understood that the unlimited ammunition with which his armies were supplied and the fact that not only his men but their families were well fed were attributable to the might of the British Navy and the enterprise of our great Mercantile Marine. He thought the allocation to the sea services of so many fit men who could have been sent to the Army was sheer waste, and the traditional obsession of a great sea power. He once flew into a temper over this criminal lavishness of good men on ships and Clemenceau had to pull him up. He always asked: "What have the Navy done? Have they done any fighting?" Our own generals, too, in their various memoranda, almost completely ignored the call of the sea on our manhood. And yet they

would have had no armies on any battlefield, had it not been for the complete command of the sea which our sailors and their auxiliary helpers on shore succeeded in maintaining, and the British people would have been driven to make peace in order to avert famine.

But sea power and shipping services were by no means the only rival claimants with the Army for men. Our coal mines needed them. We

Munitions

had not only to supply fuel for our forges, rolling mills, arsenals and munition works, but also to supply France, whose best coal mines were in German hands, and Italy, who had no coal of her own. As it was we could supply Italy with only a meagre proportion of her needs; and not only were her population suffering severely from lack of fuel, but her war effort was being crippled through lack of coal for her workshops. Our munition workers were straining to keep pace with the fabulous demands of the Army for munitions of every kind, traditional and new. These demands increased from battle to battle. During the first six months of the War the total expenditure of artillery ammunition was approximately one million rounds, including only a very trivial amount of heavy shell. In September, 1918, we were expending nearly a million rounds in a single day, including over 160,000 rounds of heavy and very heavy shell (six-inch to 15-inch). The factories in this country were also turning out considerable quantities of armaments of various kinds for our Allies. We provided a good deal of equipment for the American forces, including heavy artillery and ammunition.

The vital part played by the exploitation of British

soil during the last two years of the War to aid in feeding the nation has been described elsewhere by me.* But for that achievement, Britain would have suffered the fate which ultimately overtook Germany and her allies, of being starved first into discontent and then into surrender. As it was, our home-grown food supplies not only enabled us to divert cargoes of imported wheat to France and Italy, but to take the grave risk with our food which was involved in turning the shipping engaged on its transport to the task of bringing over the American troops. All this meant the retention of more men on the land.

Throughout the War we had to maintain our financial position for the benefit of ourselves and our Allies ; and this meant keeping up a certain measure of industry to provide goods to sell abroad in exchange for the supplies we were purchasing. Indeed, when the American Mission, headed by Colonel House, met us in London in November, 1917, one of its members, Mr. Colby, Assistant Secretary to the United States Treasury, expressed regret that we had gone as far as we had in scrapping our export industries to use our man-power for our military effort. He declared that for many reasons the United States Government, especially the Treasury, would have preferred that these trades, for economic and financial reasons, had not been killed.

For all these vitally important tasks, as indispensable to our war effort as service in the trenches, men were needed, and the Government had to take care that at least a minimum supply of labour was reserved for each. I have previously described how, as

the War progressed, legislation was adopted and administrative measures were taken for the purpose of rallying the whole available man-power of the nation and distributing it as economically as possible where it was required.*

*Organisation
of national
effort*

In course of time the reservoir of population engaged in ordinary civil avocations, which could be drawn on to supply additional man-power for one or other of the various tasks essential to our national effort, dwindled and shrank until it was practically dry. The whole manhood of the country had been surveyed and directed, either into the defence forces of the realm, or into work of vital national importance for supplying our Army and Navy, feeding the nation and our Allies, maintaining what were recognised as essential trades and industries, public utilities and administration. Some of our indispensable services had at one stage been allowed to become so depleted of workers that it was found necessary to bring back men to them out of the trenches.

In this process of organisation of our man-power the ranks of men within the military age limits had been combed and recombined with meticulous care. Every one of them who could be regarded as fit for military service (and the standard grew progressively lower and more elastic as this destructive war went on) was promptly claimed for the Army unless compelling reasons were forthcoming to warrant his retention in civil life—that is to say, that his services to the national effort would be more valuable

*Combing-out
process*

* Vol. I, Chap. ix, "Ministry of Munitions," 3, "The Problem of Labour"; Vol. II, Chap. xxiii, "The Coming of Conscription"; Vol. III, Chap. xlv, "A System of National Service"; Vol. IV, Chap. lxx, "Problems of Labour Unrest."

there than in the Army. If he was not indispensable, or if a substitute could be found for him among men not of military age and fitness, he was put into khaki. The military tribunals were constantly busy all over the country, and the military representatives upon them were always calling insistently for the enlistment of each man brought before them. Every able-bodied man was fought for. No doubt a number passed through the net who ought to have been caught ; but the Government could not override the decisions of tribunals set up by Parliament.

Complete national service, in the sense of conscripting the whole population and requiring every citizen, whatever his age or condition, to place himself under orders and take up such work as was prescribed for him by officials, was never finally enforced. Even Germany shrank from that drastic expedient, in spite of constant pressure from powerful military leaders. Nevertheless, as the War progressed, social pressure and the economic measures taken by the Government combined to bring about a state of affairs more and more nearly approximating to what could have been ordained under such a system. But so far as men of military age were concerned, the working of the Conscriptions Acts brought it about that every one of them was marked down, registered, and either taken into the Army or allocated to some job where his service would be of still greater value to the national effort. Doubtless there were some shirkers, or "skrimshankers" and "khaki dodgers," as they were contemptuously designated, who managed to evade the Army when they should rightly have been in it. But they were not a high percentage ; had

all such been ruthlessly picked out, the total reinforcement they would have provided would have been trivial in numbers and poor in fighting quality. Before the end of 1917 it might safely be asserted that there was no source of potential recruits left uncombed, no reservoir of man-power undrained. Apart from the annual increment of youths reaching military age, the only way to secure further reinforcements for the Army was to divert to it men already serving the country in other ways, in munition works, coal mines, shipyards, transport, food production, public utilities, essential trades and industries, where their services had hitherto been judged indispensable.

Whether any considerable body of these men should be thus diverted to the Army was a problem for statesmanship. It could not just be settled by the requisitions of the Army authorities. The generals could not be expected to judge the issue dispassionately. Their reckless wastage of the man-power so lavishly placed at their disposal also vitiated their judgment. Apart from that consideration, they were not responsible for ensuring the maintenance of our naval services, our shipping, our dockyards, our railways, our agriculture, our arrangements for feeding and clothing the nation, nor even our munition supply. Neither were they concerned with the preservation of national unity by avoiding the irritation and exasperation which threatened to impair the national spirit. They were solely concerned with military operations. They desired bigger and bigger armies with an insistent and almost querulous appetite. In the constant demands made upon the Government for more and more men to fill up gaps and equip the

*Short-sighted
demands of
the military*

new services in the Army, there was no indication that our great Generals realised that there could be any other demands for man-power entitled to recognition. They were not to be persuaded that we could not carry on these essential non-military services entirely with the rejects of medical examiners. Every fit person diverted from their armies to any other purpose represented a betrayal of trust by pusillanimous and undiscerning politicians. Were there not hundreds of thousands of men in Britain still allowed to skulk at home? If sent to Flanders, they would pave the highway to a glorious triumph! It was a war of attrition; as Sir William Robertson had written: "We should follow the principle of the gambler who has the heaviest purse and force our adversary's hand and make him go on spending until he is a pauper."*

The Official History of the Military Operations in France and Flanders laments that the reinforcements called for by the Generals were not always provided in full and promptly. Yet we sent more men to reinforce our armies on the Western Front in 1917 than we had promised to provide, because the casualties exceeded the worst anticipations. Our military critics would have been in a better position to complain, had they given the Government the aid of their influence in stopping the criminal wastage of so many hundreds of thousands of our picked young men on enterprises which they must have known had no chance of success. Had they done so, the German success in the spring offensive of 1918 would have been anticipated and averted. Further, it must be remembered that the big reinforcements originally demanded by Sir Douglas

*Complaints
of shortage
unwarranted*

Haig in the late autumn of 1917 were not just to defend his line until the arrival of the American Army should make a great offensive all along the front a feasible operation, but in order that he himself should be able to continue in the spring his Passchendaele attack, and thus throw away another 200,000 or 300,000 men before our Allies were ready to co-operate. To these plans the French Generals and many of our own were opposed, and we had no intention of disorganising our national arrangements in order to provide them. On the other hand, it seemed clear from the figures available to us—including those furnished by Sir Douglas Haig himself—that the forces at his disposal, with such reinforcements as we could supply, were adequate to repel any attack provided the defences were put in good order, the troops wisely distributed along the line in suitable proportions, and the reserves properly adjusted in readiness to support any threatened sector.

Nor was the problem purely material. The morale of the home front was fully as vital to success as the defence of the line in France. Ruthless expedients for reinforcing the Army which precipitated civil disturbances, strikes and possibly revolution in Britain would have been a poor way of seeking victory. Some of the emergency measures which in the crisis of the spring of 1918 were taken to reinforce our hard-pressed Army were not only measures so detrimental to the nation's war activities in other vital directions that nothing less than such a crisis would have justified them on material grounds; they were measures which only that crisis rendered psychologically possible. Had any attempt been made to enforce them previously, it

*Need to
maintain
morale of
home front*

would have provoked civil disturbance and domestic collapse. As it was, they produced a violent national protest in Ireland and we got no recruits there.

It is with these considerations in mind that the man-power demands of the Army at the end of 1917, and the Government's attitude to those demands must be studied.

One of the greatest difficulties experienced by the Government in allocating man-power was attributable to the constantly shifting figures of War Office requirements. An official who had been working at what was for him a purely statistical problem at the War Office once informed me that it was the most hopeless task he had ever undertaken. No one seemed to understand the simplest principles of arithmetic. It was not that they could not add or subtract, but he could not find anyone who was certain what ought to be added and what subtracted. Categories shifted about from day to day. The result depended on the view taken at the time by the individual officer who performed the operation or his superior. That view was a changeable one and according to the exigencies of opinion the figures fluctuated. Amidst all the shuffling and transmutations no one could answer with certainty a simple question as to the numbers of our fighting men. One distinguished General who had been deputed to investigate the actual position told me that when he started his inquiry he found 40,000 men had vanished altogether ; and although they were on the pay-roll no one could explain where they were. I can understand the unreliability of guesses made at enemy casualties. These are always exaggerated on both

*Confusion
of military
estimates*

sides. One estimate given to me, of 1,000,000 Germans killed and wounded on the Somme opposite the British line alone and of almost a similar number put *hors de combat* in the Battle of Flanders, did seem a particularly wild guess. When, however, you come to add up the numbers on the pay-roll of your own army, it seems to be a simple sum for unbiased mathematicians. But the fact remains that military Staff figures had no relation to actual conditions or facts ; they varied according to the case which the High Command had to make for the time being. When G.H.Q. were bent upon either launching a new offensive or continuing or renewing an old one, then the men at their disposal indicated an overwhelming superiority over those which the enemy could put into the fighting line.

In the discussions of the War Committee of the Cabinet in June, 1917, when the Passchendaele offensive was under consideration,* Sir William Robertson said that as regards man-power, he anticipated no difficulty. He hoped to have 150,000 men to send out, with which to supply the 20,000 or 30,000 wanted to complete the establishment of the Army in France and replace the casualties suffered in the attack. He would also send out the 67th Division.

The drafts sent out to the Army in France in the summer of 1917 were in fact in excess of the amounts promised. According to a War Office letter to Sir Douglas Haig of February 15th, 1917, and subsequent letters, he was promised 356,000 men between March 1st and October 31st, 1917. The number actually sent was 376,000—an excess of 20,000.

* cf. Vol. IV, p. 2161.

The German strength on the Western Front in 1917 was considerably below that of the Franco-British forces, and in pleading for his Flanders offensive in June, Haig insisted that much of it was of inferior quality.

On 8th October, in response to a request from me, Haig wrote to the C.I.G.S. giving his appreciation of what rôle the British Armies should adopt if Russia were forced out of the War. He then declared that our forces were in good fettle, that the Germans were badly broken, that their reserves of man-power would be exhausted by May or June, 1918, and that by 1st April, 1918, the Allies would outnumber the Germans in actual numbers by 30 per cent. even after allowing for the number of divisions which the Germans might be able to bring across from their Eastern Front.

It is true that this estimate was based on the assumption that the gaps in the British Army would be filled by reinforcements from home; but the total deficiency reported to the Government only amounted to 75,000 men—a number well within our capacity to supply—and even if it were not filled, our superiority according to Haig's October estimate would still be well over 20 per cent. These were the figures submitted to us when it was necessary to exaggerate our strength in order to justify a costly offensive.

But when the policy changed, and it was decided to postpone offensives until the American troops arrived, and Haig was invited meanwhile to take over more line, then the alleged superiority disappeared and was transformed into an alarming deficiency. During the whole time the Cabinet Committee was investigating the question of man-power, the figures supplied

through the War Office were being constantly altered, and the Cabinet were quite unable to get any stable and reliable estimates as to the actual position.

The estimates supplied in the War Office letter of 3rd November, 1917, showed that by 31st October, 1918, allowing for men recovering in France from wounds and returning to the forces, there would be a net infantry deficit of 259,000 men, most of which would be offset by a considerable increase in the numbers of men attached to mechanised arms at the disposal of our Army.

A fresh estimate, contained in a Memorandum by the C.I.G.S. dated 19th November, 1917, stated that the Army was then nearly 100,000 men below strength. There was no clear indication of the basis of this estimate, which appeared to make no allowance for the increase in arms other than infantry. "To provide for the normal winter wastage, and bring the Armies up to strength by April, 1918, we require 500,000 men," it continued. "Towards this we have now in sight 225,000 men. By the end of October next it is calculated that, if no further measures are sanctioned, the Armies will be 300,000 men below strength."

Five days later, another and yet more gloomy estimate was furnished in a letter from Sir Douglas Haig. Writing on 24th November, 1917, to the War Office, he declared that "it is evident from calculations based on previous experience that the British Infantry in France will be approximately 250,000 or about 40 per cent. below establishment on the 31st March next."

*Estimates
of wastage*

According to another G.H.Q. calculation made at

about this time, quoted in the Official History,* the shortage by 31st October in the infantry on the Western Front would be 460,000. All these changing figures proved to be purely fanciful. They were not estimates carefully prepared by officials who understood the elements of accountancy but merely a succession of grouses from Generals who had failed to achieve what they had hoped for and had promised and were anxious to put the blame for their discomfiture on the politicians who had dared to predict the failure.

The figures supplied by the Adjutant-General in the latter part of December to the Cabinet Committee on Man-power provide yet a further variant of the rate of wastage and the need for reinforcements. It is suggested by these figures that up to 31st March, the wastage of troops in France will amount to 260,100 men—equivalent to 86,700 men a month. These figures were a ludicrous exaggeration, and it is difficult not to regard them as a deliberate miscalculation.† These were the computed losses involved in holding the trenches during the winter. They obviously do not include estimated losses during some great battle. Pétain estimated his losses for the same period for a longer line at 40,000 a month. The total estimate of the number of men needed for the Army up to the end of September, 1918, was put at 1,304,000; and after reckoning the men already in khaki who could be drafted out from the forces in Britain, and recovered wounded and sick, it was stated that 600,000 new recruits would be needed.

* "Military Operations in France and Belgium, 1918," Vol. I, p. 27.

† The total casualties actually incurred in France between 1st January and 31st March, 1918, were 196,567. These included the heavy losses of the Battle of St. Quentin.

On reviewing all these different estimates, it can be noted, first, that they each contradict the other, and secondly, that they become progressively more alarmist and rapacious.

Another curious feature in the calculations of our military strength by the War Office was the way they

Obsession with rifle strength concentrated on rifle strength, and ignored the man-power allocated to other combatant services. As the War went on the

mechanical power at the disposal of the Armies increased rapidly. In artillery, machine-guns, aviation, tanks and transport, machinery was playing a more and more important part in the struggle and was consequently absorbing more and more men. The mechanical superiority of the Allies in 1918 was largely responsible for the acceleration and the completeness of the victory. Infantry comparisons are therefore misleading, and when used in controversial attacks on Governments deliberately confuse the issue for those who are ignorant of the make-up of modern armies. It has been suggested for instance, that the Government had only provided for the British Army in France for the whole of 1918 a reinforcement of 100,000. This is, of course, flagrantly untrue.

The letter from the War Office to Sir Douglas Haig on 3rd November, 1917, dealing with the man-power outlook, explained that the total man-power in sight to meet his needs for the next twelve months including new recruits and recovered sick and wounded would be 688,000. But while this number of 688,000 was anticipated as available to make up his man-power, it would not all be used up by the infantry. There were other imperative calls, of which the most formidable was 110,000 to be used

to form entirely new units for the flying corps, the artillery, the machine-gun corps, tanks and military railways, while a further 80,000 were set aside for maintaining the strength of existing formations of these mechanical arms. Obviously, such arms as tanks and machine-guns were worth, in effect, many times the number of their personnel, compared with infantry. So that if a proportion of men was deducted from potential infantry reinforcements and sent, instead, as new units of these mechanical arms that were coming to play a rapidly growing part in the conflict, the net result was to multiply, not to diminish, the value of the man-power supplied for the line. But the rigid traditionalism of the military authorities never fully appreciated this lesson, which was the most conspicuous discovery and development of the War. When the War Office gave us its estimates of man-power requirements, the men set aside for these formidable engines of war were not counted. The figures given to the Government were those of "rifle strength." It mattered not that a single tank with its crew might be capable of forcing a break in an enemy line more efficiently and cheaply than a whole company of infantry; that half a dozen machine-guns, well placed, could hold up a battalion. That was no consolation for the fact that potential reinforcements for the infantry had been withheld. If these new-fangled weapons, which had played no part in the lessons taught them at the Staff College, must be used—and it was gradually acknowledged that they had a subsidiary value—then they must be manned without detriment to the numbers of the infantry.

Up to this hour, when a case has to be made against the Government of the day for neglect of its duty to

the Army, or an excuse manufactured for Generals who have failed, the figures quoted are always confined to the infantry. The drain on man-power involved in providing the vast increases in the mechanical powers of the Army, in artillery, machine-guns, tanks, aeroplanes and railways behind

*Growth of
mechanical
services*

the lines, is completely ignored, although these appliances multiply the power of the Army a hundredfold. Since the early days of the War the mechanical weapons of offence on the British side had multiplied enormously. The heavy artillery once numbered in tens could now be counted in thousands, and in weight, calibre and range they were vastly more powerful. The machine-guns, of which there were a few scanty hundreds in 1914, by 1918 had mounted up to scores of thousands. Tanks were not even thought of in those early days. Now they played an essential part in any great offensive. As for the increase in aircraft, it was immeasurable, alike in numbers and in power. Infantry were still essential to hold the line, and to exploit the activities of the mechanical arms, but every infantryman to-day counted for many times more than he did in those gloomy days when he could be bombarded with impunity in his trenches, and when the feeble artillery with which he was supported could not even tear gaps in the barbed wire against which he was called upon to advance, let alone destroy the trenches which sheltered the enemy riflemen or the machine-gun emplacements which mowed down our advancing troops. Mechanical appliances of all kinds rendered the deadly duties of the infantry easier and less costly. But increasing appliances implied the need of more and more men to handle them, and less and less pure riflemen to

support them. The artillery tore up barbed wire, smashed the trenches and emplacements that provided cover for enemy riflemen and machine-gunners, protected advancing troops with a barrage of shell ; the tanks crashed through all obstacles and thus gave facility and support for the attacking infantrymen. The aeroplanes not only helped by observation, but they took part in the fight. In the battle of the spring where our infantry were hard pressed by the enemy our aeroplanes attacked from the air with bomb and machine-gun and helped to relieve the pressure and to check the speed of the German advance. It is only those who survived Neuve Chapelle, Festubert and Loos, where our infantrymen were shot down at leisure in front of unbroken barbed wire, who knew what the enormous improvement in mechanisation meant to the British infantry. No infantryman would ever complain if these machines were rendered more powerful, even if the size of his division was thereby reduced.

The enormous improvement in our communications behind the line also constituted a source of new strength to our armies. Hundreds of miles of new roads and railways were constructed by us to facilitate transport of men and material directly to the line and laterally from one part of the line to another. The facility and speed with which troops could be moved from one part of the front to the other made it unnecessary to mass such large numbers of troops on any one sector. This fact is noted by the famous German Staff officer, Colonel Wetzell, in the advice he gave to Ludendorff prior to the March offensive :—

*Importance of
military
transport*

“ We are in a position very quickly to transfer

extraordinarily large forces by rail, but our enemy on the Western Front can do so in a still higher degree, thanks to the excellent railway communications behind his front. Besides, both hostile armies possess a very large number of motor vehicles, which have already often contributed decisive services (Verdun) by the rapid bringing up of reinforcements. . . . In view of the favourable and numerous railway communications the possibility of very rapid counter-measures from the north by the British, and from the south by the French, must be regarded as on the cards. We must reckon with certainty that, should we have a striking initial success, we shall soon be involved in a wearisome struggle with the main forces of both our opponents."

Colonel Wetzell was right in his apprehension that the German offensive would be wrecked by the excellent communications developed behind the Allied lines. These railways and roads saved our Third and Fifth Armies from being overwhelmed by numbers in the spring offensive, and had they been used sooner, would have checked the German advance at an earlier date. They also enabled us to check the German break-through on the Lys by the timely transport of reinforcements. Roads and railways are a fundamental part of the equipment of a modern army. They are formidable weapons of war. It is interesting to note that this improvement in our communications was achieved by a civilian reorganisation of the transport arrangements in France, which was forced upon the War Office in September, 1916. It led to a conflict between myself and the Army Council at the time. Nevertheless, it turned out to be one of the

outstanding successes of the War.* These communications not only saved us from disaster in March and April, they also contributed materially to that rapid concentration of troops and guns which broke up the German Armies in the autumn of 1918.

But all these mechanical improvements which constituted such a feature of this war involved the diversion on a great scale of man-power from infantry and cavalry to other and newer services. Every other army in the field recognised that fact at a fairly early stage, and consequently reduced the traditional standard of numbers in their brigades and divisions. The Germans were the first to recognise that machine-guns automatically multiplied the numbers of their riflemen. The French soon followed suit. We were the last to perceive the shift of values, and adapt our divisional formations to it.

Nothing will enable us better to understand how thoroughly the developments of the War changed the distribution of man-power in the Army than a comparison of the figures of 1914 with those in the last year of the War.

*Statistics of
growth of
special arms*

These are set out in the following table, showing the total strength of the British Army, Regular and Territorial Forces (excluding Colonial and Indian troops) at home and abroad in August, 1914, and March, 1918. In connection with the figures for August, 1914, it should be pointed out that more than half the total nominal strength consisted of Territorial troops, who were only very partially trained, and were unready for full active service for months. Their number is given alongside the

* cf. Vol. II, Chap. xxviii, pp. 785 *et seq.*

grand total of the 1914 forces in which they are included :—

ARM OR BRANCH.	TOTAL	AUGUST, 1914. Territorial (included in previous column)	MARCH, 1918.
Cavalry	46,496	(25,418)	89,074
Artillery : Light ..	58,766	(39,977)	339,135
Heavy ..	27,275		194,540
Royal Engineers ..	24,035	(13,808)	304,241
Foot Guards and Infantry	306,654	(166,701)	1,750,202
Cyclist Corps	—	—	20,430
Machine-Gun Corps ..	—	—	100,879
Tank Corps	—	—	20,173
Royal Flying Corps ..	1,200	—	144,078
Royal Army Service Corps	14,491	(8,184)	318,700
Royal Army Medical Corps	17,840	(13,770)	141,740
R.A.O.C., R.A.V.C., A.P.C.	3,588	(153)	78,966
Labour Corps	—	—	348,555
Non-Combatant Corps ..	—	—	3,277
TOTAL	500,345	(268,011)	3,889,990

From this table it will be seen that the infantry strength of the Army was multiplied nearly sixfold, but the other branches (excluding cavalry which just doubled) increased fourteenfold. The augmentation of the mechanical power of our forces 14 times represents a much higher multiple in the striking-power of the Army as a whole. Another feature of this increase which had a direct bearing on the criticisms directed against the War Cabinet is the fact that the army commanded by Marshal Haig had a much higher percentage of this mechanical reinforcement in proportion to the total numbers of the men in a given theatre of war than any of our armies on any other front. The "side-shows" were very skimpily treated in the matter of artillery—especially

heavy artillery and aeroplanes. Tanks were a luxury almost completely denied to these abominations.

In view of these striking figures it is simply dishonest to dwell on the numbers of riflemen in the infantry as if that represented fairly the efforts made by the Government in the supply of man-power for our forces at the various fronts. There is only one explanation for it. The enormous increase in mechanical power—artillery, ammunition, machine-guns, aeroplanes, tanks and transport—was due to the initiative, vision and enterprise of civilians.

It was not easy for the Cabinet in face of the medley of discrepant figures and estimates presented to it, to decide what the real needs of the Army were. And that knowledge was an essential preliminary to any prudent apportionment of our dwindling man-power to the best advantage amongst the competing claims of vital services for a share in it.

As we had been advised that the War would probably continue until 1919 and that we must contemplate the probability of having to provide for the requirements of two more campaigns, we decided in December, 1917, to set up a special Committee of the Cabinet to examine the whole question of man-power and submit proposals as to the action it would be desirable to take to deal with this problem. The Committee consisted of Lord Curzon, Mr. G. N. Barnes, Sir Edward Carson and General Smuts, with myself in the chair. The figures were obtained by the Ministry of National Service from the Departments concerned including the War Office.

The problems reviewed were: the comparative strength of the Allies and the enemy on the Western Front; the existing reserves available on both sides;

*Man-power
Committee
set up*

the civilian man-power in Britain ; the purposes it was needed to serve ; and the amount of it which could be made available for military use. Here the general principle adopted by the Committee was that the chief aim must be to safeguard the staying power of all the Allies until the Americans could come into the fray with their great resources and turn the scale in our favour. And that safeguarding must involve the maintenance not only of the armies, but of the nations as a whole.

The " Official History " declares, in a tone of censure, that not one of the members of this Committee was a soldier. That General Smuts should be classed as " no soldier " is surely a consummate example of the workings of the professional military mind. True, he had not devoted all his life to soldiering ; neither had Sir Douglas Haig's Chief of the Staff, Sir Herbert Lawrence. Those who had campaigned against Smuts in the South African War could hardly deny his remarkable military quality. And in the Great War, after a brilliant campaign in German South-West Africa, he commanded during 1916 our forces in East Africa in the fight with von Lettow-Vorbeck. In any case, this was a Committee of the Cabinet, composed of Ministers of the Crown, responsible not only for governing the country and guarding all the interests of its citizens, but also for the direction of the War as a whole on sea and land. The Army had no such wide responsibility, and army officers as such obviously could have neither the knowledge nor the authority to settle matters involving the whole economic life of the nation and its whole war effort, diplomatic, naval, industrial, commercial and financial. The Army had no special knowledge

of these problems, and could claim no more right than the Navy, the Ministry of Munitions, the Treasury, the Board of Trade, the Ministries of Labour and of Agriculture, the Shipping, Coal or Food Controllers to a representative on the Committee. But the Man-power Committee were supplied with all figures possessed by the General Staff of the War Office, bearing upon their investigation, and the Director of Military Intelligence and the Adjutant-General attended on behalf of the War Office to give such further explanations as the Committee might require on these matters. Every draft of the Report was submitted to the War Office for its observations. Thus the insinuation of the Official History that the military view was not represented at the Committee's session is disingenuous.

Among the main features of the Report noted above, the first was that of the comparative strength of the Allies and the enemy on the Western Front. After the Report was first drafted, the General Staff came to the conclusion that the figures under this head which it had supplied were too favourable, and submitted revised figures. Yet even these could hardly be regarded as seriously alarming.

According to the General Staff's amended tables, the position in the West in December, 1917, was that the Allies had 169½ divisions on the French Front against 151 German divisions; and a combatant strength of 3,420,000 (exclusive of 11,800 Indian troops) compared with 2,536,000 for the Germans—i.e., an Allied superiority of 18½ divisions, and of 884,000 combatant troops. On the Italian Front the Allies had a superiority to the combined Austrian and German forces of 409,000 combatants.

Despite this considerable superiority, we had been unable to break the German Front. As a matter of fact, ever since 1915 the Allies had held on the Western Front a marked advantage in numbers. In 1917 this amounted to more than seven Allied to four German soldiers. At the end of 1917 the combined total combatant strength (not ration strength) of the French and British forces in all theatres of war was 3,700,000, while that of the Germans on all fronts, East and West, was 3,400,000. If the total forces of the Allies on all fronts (including Italians, Belgians, Portuguese, etc.) be compared with the total forces of the Central Powers and their Turk and Bulgar allies, then the Allies, without including any Russians or Roumanians, had a combatant strength of 5,400,000 against a combatant strength of 5,200,000 for the Central Powers.

Russians and Roumanians were excluded from this calculation ; but even if they concluded a separate peace with Germany, she would still have to maintain a considerable force on her Eastern Front, for reasons I give in another chapter. She could transfer a number of divisions to the West ; enough to exceed the Allied Armies in the number of divisional formations, and approximately to equal them in rifle strength, though not in artillery, tanks and aeroplanes.

But if the Allies, with a seven to four superiority, had been unable to break through the German lines in 1917, was there any reason to suppose that the Germans, with approximately equal rifle strength, with troops whose quality was poor and whose fighting value was low (according to Haig's memorandum of 8th October, 1917), would be able to break

*Prolonged
Allied
superiority*

*Allied forces
adequate for
defence*

through the Allied lines in the spring of 1918, especially as the mechanical strength and mobility of the enemy was definitely inferior to that possessed by the Allies?

We had to take full cognisance of the fact that the superiority we still held in December, 1917, was rapidly diminishing owing to the transference of German troops from Russia, *German troops from Russia* and that by the following spring there might be proximate equality until the Americans arrived. The Committee was bound to consider what the position would be in May, 1918, assuming that the Germans were able to withdraw from the Russian Front all the divisions they could afford to take away, having regard to the disturbed condition of that country and the need for organising its resources to supply German deficiencies in food and raw materials. The revised estimate of the Staff was that 41 divisions might be thus transferred, including 824,000 combatant troops. The possibility was also envisaged of Austrian divisions being brought to the front, but this, quite correctly, as it turned out, was reckoned to be improbable in any appreciable numbers.

On the Allied side, the possibility was noted that troops might be transferred to France from other fronts. We were of opinion, as were the *Allied troops from Italy and the East* Versailles Council, that British and French divisions ought to be withdrawn from Italy or in the alternative that Italian divisions should be brought to France. For the delays that occurred in bringing troops from Italy the General Staffs were entirely responsible. It was their business and not that of the Governments concerned to make arrangements for the transfer once

they had secured the assent of the Government to the removal. The Governments concerned not only approved that course but actually suggested and urged it. It was also contemplated that in the event of an emergency, troops should be withdrawn from Egypt and Palestine, as we were ridiculously over-insured in our Turkish campaigns. It had been decided to fill three white divisions with Indian troops in order to bring the British units to France. Here also there were unaccountable and reprehensible delays on the part of the military authorities. But, apart from these reinforcements drawn from other theatres, the main hope of additional formations lay with the advent of American troops. How soon these would materialise was uncertain, but General Bliss at that time hoped to have ten fighting and two replacement divisions in France by May, and as many more by December, 1918. It will be remembered that an American division had three times as many men as a British, French or German division.

Passing from the question of additional reinforcing formations to that of reserves, the Committee set out the estimates of the numbers of men on each side that would be available for maintaining the strength of these formations and making good the casualties during 1918. On the German side, assuming that some 76,000 men could be drawn from defence divisions left on the Eastern Front, after the 41 active divisions, above mentioned, had been transferred to the West, the total reserves that would be available in the course of the year would be 926,000. On the Allied side, the estimated reserves in sight during the

year—British, French and American—were put at 1,356,400. This included an estimated 202,400 American reserves, in addition to the 20 fighting divisions it was hoped they would supply before the end of 1918. Actually the American contribution vastly exceeded this estimate before the conclusion of hostilities in November, 1918, owing to the special arrangements we made for carrying American troops across the Atlantic in British ships.

There were, the Committee pointed out, other non-statistical considerations, such as generalship, organisation, national morale, fighting quality. The Allies had, as an ultimate resource, the vast potentialities of the United States, and there were fewer boys and elderly men in their forces than in the enemy ranks. They also had more artillery, tanks, aeroplanes and available lorries on the Western Front. The German defenders of the March offensive before the Reichstag Committee claimed that they had a *slight* superiority in numbers, but admitted that they were inferior in guns and other mechanical equipment. All our experience of offensives on the Western Front justified us in believing that under these conditions the Germans would not possess the necessary superiority to break through the Allied lines and defeat our armies—always provided these armies were reasonably well handled. No mathematical superiority can save unintelligent leadership from disaster. After reckoning all these factors, the Man-power Committee of the Cabinet concluded that they :—

*Other
factors*

*Committee's
verdict*

“ do not appear to modify the general conclusion

to be drawn from the man-power figures, that the Allies ought to be able to hold their own on the Western Front until the period when the increase of American strength begins to alter the balance of advantage in their favour."

Despite an unusual display of strategical and tactical ineptitude in the Allied conduct of the spring operations, this forecast was justified by the event.

From this branch of the survey, the Committee proceeded to an examination of the remaining man-power of Britain, the uses to which *Demand and supply* it was being put, the nature of the demands for it, and the number that could be taken from other services for our armed forces—naval as well as military. They considered the requests for further recruits made by all the Services, the calculations upon which those requests were based ; the numbers and occupations of men of military age still in civilian life, and the degree of urgency of demand for their work ; and recommended a number of further measures, administrative and legislative, to secure the best distribution of our man-power and the maximum contribution to the Army.

The demands laid before the Committee by the Services for additional able-bodied recruits to be withdrawn from civilian work and handed over to them, amounted to 90,000 new men for the Navy and R.N.A.S. and 600,000 for the Army. These demands were additional to those for lower-category men for non-combatant work with the Army and Air Force, and for the recruitment of all youths fit for service as they reached the age of 18.

The representatives of the Navy could give the

Committee no figures analysing the basis of their demand for 90,000 new men ; so that the Committee could not scrutinise this estimate. However, in their recommendations, the Committee made an allowance of 50,000 for the Navy out of the number of " A " men they thought it possible to withdraw from civilian work.

*For the
Navy*

The demand of the Army for an additional 600,000 recruits from the civilian population was based upon a long and elaborate series of calculations.

*For the
Army*

Several of the items of this series were by no means convincing.

The Army authorities placed their gross demand for an additional supply of men during 1918 at 1,304,000. This figure represented :—

165,300 men wanted for expanding the flying corps and artillery, and creating new units in such growing services as machine-gun corps, tanks, etc.

95,000 to make up the Army in France to establishment.

671,700 to replace wastage in the Army in France up to 30th September, 1918.

192,000 to replace wastage in other theatres to 31st October.

160,000 to be in training to meet wastages in all theatres between October and the end of January, 1919.

20,000 to replace skilled shipwrights which the Army was being asked to release to aid the ship-building programme.

To meet this gross demand for 1,304,000 men, the Army authorities reckoned they would be able to

draft 449,000 "A" men from the forces at home, up to 31st October, 1918, while of the sick and wounded becoming fit for general service they reckoned there would be 240,000. Together these totalled 689,000, leaving 615,000 deficit on their estimated requirements.

Now in the argument presented by these figures there were obvious gaps, to some of which the Committee drew attention.

To begin with, the 165,000 men to expand the mechanical strength of the army could not be treated as a deficit to be made up. Quite the reverse. It would obviously not entail any reduction in the total number of our combatant forces, if the men required for expanding the artillery and flying corps and creating fresh units for tanks and machine-gun corps, were drawn from the ranks of existing recruits. True, such a process would deplete the infantry establishment, but all these new formations gave redoubled support and strength to the infantry. As our supplies of cannon grew more lavish, we could economise more on "cannon-fodder."

Since there was not the man-power available to expand these new units to the extent desired and at the same time keep all our infantry divisions reinforced up to the full traditional establishment, it became a question of either cutting down the number of divisional formations, or of reducing the establishment of ordinary infantry in each division. The second course was that recommended and already adopted by all the other leading belligerent armies. It had been urged upon us by the French for some time. In order to secure the fullest advantage from the

*Infantry not
the only
combatants*

*Reduction
of size of
divisions*

new weapons now available—machine-guns, trench mortars, etc.—and the greatly increased artillery strength, it was clearly necessary to attach full complements of these to as many infantry formations as possible. To achieve this end, a reduction of the number of battalions in a division from 12 to nine had already been carried out by both the French and the German Armies, and the numbers constituting each battalion had also been reduced. This reduction did not mean that the resources of these two belligerent countries had become exhausted. Indeed, Germany had a larger number of men in the various battlefields in 1918 than she had in 1914. But the enormous increase in the mechanical power at the disposal of her armies had rendered it necessary that she should allocate a considerable proportion of her men to the new units thus created. The net result was that with diminished numbers of infantry her divisions were three times as powerful as they were at the commencement of the War.

Sir Douglas Haig, however, was opposed to such a reconstruction. He held that if through shortage of man-power it were impossible to keep the divisions up to the existing infantry establishment, it would be preferable to break up some of them, rather than to reduce them to nine battalions each. Foch, on the other hand, was always specially insistent on the importance of keeping up the number of divisional formations, even although it were found impossible to maintain the standard number of troops in each division. The German Staff took the same line, until their divisions were so reduced that they consisted of only 2,000 or 3,000 men. It could hardly be suggested that the military authorities of France

*Haig's
opposition*

and Germany were inferior to the British in expert knowledge and sound judgment on problems of military organisation. Yet alike our Army Council and our Commander-in-Chief protested bitterly against such a reorganisation and as usual blamed the politicians. They were accustomed to 12-battalion divisions, and they could not understand that methods of warfare had been revolutionised since the days of the Expeditionary Force of 1914 when we depended on the firing efficiency of our riflemen and their skill in bayonet practice, and when our artillery was almost entirely light ; when we had few aeroplanes, still fewer heavy guns, not many machine-guns and no tanks.

The Cabinet Committee on Man-power strongly urged that we should follow the example of the French and Germans by reducing the number of infantry men in a division. *Reduction recommended* The Army objections to it were obviously ill-founded. Indeed, the "Official History," while it feels in duty bound to support the Army Council and the Commander-in-Chief in their protests, cannot pretend to accept their reasons, and fumbles for a different ground. The Official Historian writes :—

"It was not so much the nature of the change—which would indeed increase the proportion of guns per thousand infantry, *which was eminently desirable*—but the time selected for it which was open to objection."

It would be interesting to know what better time than January and February—a quiet time at the front—could have been chosen for an "eminently desirable" change. The diary of the War shows that there was a complete cessation of all serious

military operations on the Western Front from the end of December, 1917, to the middle of March, 1918. It was the longest quiet spell we had known for two years.

The reduction of the divisional establishments advised by the Committee was finally ordered by the War Office on 10th January, 1918. It

Reduction was anticipated that the change over
carried out would be complete by 15th February.

Actually, it was carried through more slowly. Only three of the four armies in France completed their divisional reorganisation before the end of February, the Fourth Army finishing it on 4th March. The infantry holding Passchendaele must not be reduced until the last possible moment whatever happened elsewhere! The whole affair, including the wrath of the Army Council and the Commander-in-Chief at the proposal, the dilatoriness with which it was finally carried through, and the lingering resentment at it displayed by the Official History, furnishes a melancholy illustration of that rigidity and reluctance to adopt new methods to fit new conditions, which so constantly handicapped our efforts in the War and cost us needlessly heavy casualties. It was left for civilians to force on the Army the use and development of tanks, machine-guns and machine-gun corps, heavy guns, high explosives, improved transport and all other means of economising man-power and heightening its efficiency. It is perhaps worth noting in this connection that on 15th January, 1918, the War Cabinet decided to send a telegram to the Military Representatives on the Supreme War Council at Versailles, saying that :—

“In order to secure the advantage of the experience of other Allied Armies, the Military

Representatives at Versailles are requested to report as soon as possible on the economising of manpower, casualties and tonnage, which might be effected by the fullest and most scientific employment of machine-guns, automatic rifles, tanks, and other mechanical devices."

The second matter queried by the Cabinet Committee was the estimated rate of wastage. It was at a higher rate than that experienced in 1917, when we had been continually on the offensive in the most sanguinary fighting.

*Rate of
wastage*

Further, French experience showed that the *net* wastage (total casualties less the number of wounded and sick that returned to the forces) represented only 25 per cent. of the combatant strength; whereas the War Office was calculating a 55 per cent. rate. The British Army had of course been fighting hard on the offensive all through 1917; but as it was to stand on the defensive for the early part of 1918, the Committee considered that the military estimate was likely to prove unduly large.

In their reply to the Committee, the Army Council were indignant at the suggestion that the defence cost less than the attack. They wrote :—

*Cost of
attack v.
defence*

"There is nothing in the experience of this war or in any other to support the argument that a defensive policy necessarily entails fewer losses than an offensive policy; once fighting begins, and therefore in the opinion of the Military Members the adoption of a defensive policy does not justify making provision for a lower rate of wastage than that estimated by the War Office. . . ."

The actual experience of the War as a whole, as since ascertained, disproves this contention of the Army Council. The casualty figures in the War, secured as the result of very careful inquiry by the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, in 1922, show conclusively that in the course of our offensives—and except for the spring of 1918, our forces in France were almost continually acting on the offensive—our total casualties were as three to two of the Germans opposite our front. On the Somme, in Flanders and elsewhere, we habitually suffered at least 50 per cent. more casualties than we inflicted. On the other hand, in the big German offensives of March and April, the proportion was reversed. Between 21st March and 30th April, 1918, the total losses in killed and wounded along the British Front were : British, 209,466 ; German 308,825. It is true that on account of the big sweep forward achieved by the Germans, our losses during this period in prisoners and missing were heavier than theirs. But when these further losses on both sides are added, the balance is still against the Germans, the total figures being respectively : British, 302,869 ; German, 348,769. The Germans were often accused by our military authorities of understating their casualties, especially in the latter part of the War. If there is substance in this charge then the German casualties during their offensive must have been still more heavy than ours.

The killed are of course the final casualties, for a considerable proportion of wounded recover and return to active service. In the British Army the proportion that recovered and returned to the forces was five out of nine, while of the remainder, the larger part recovered sufficiently to return to civil

life and take up work which released other men for the Army. In the number of *killed* during the German offensives of March and April, the respective losses were : British, 28,128 ; German, 56,639. Thus in killed alone, the Germans lost more than twice as many as the British.

When, later in the summer, we resumed the offensive, our casualties again became three to two of the Germans.

In the estimates submitted by the Military Authorities to the Man-power Committee, the figure of wastage in other theatres appeared to be particularly excessive. The actual total casualties in all theatres other than France during 1917 were 48,000. The Army Council put the figure for 1918 at 192,000. Even after making a generous allowance for contingencies, the Ministry of National Service thought that 120,000 would be ample under this head. Whether the number wanted would prove to be 120,000 or 192,000, it was clear that comparatively few of them would be required in these other theatres till well on in the year, so that if an emergency arose in France in the spring, the drafts for our Eastern Armies would still be available for the French Front.

While the War Office estimates of the number of additional recruits they would need in 1918 were thus magnified by every artifice, their reckoning of the numbers they could dispose of to supply their needs, apart from further recruits from the adult civil population, were cut down to the lowest point. Even the Official History seems to be somewhat surprised at their assumption that they would only be able to furnish 449,000 men to the Overseas forces out of the troops they had available in Britain. According to the War

*Overestimates
for minor
theatres*

*War Office
underestimate
supply of men*

Office returns, there were on 1st January, 1918, in the United Kingdom 74,403 officers and 1,486,459 other ranks of the British Army, of whom 38,225 officers were fit for general service, while of the "other ranks," 607,403 were then "available," 78,886 belonged to permanent cadres, and the remainder, some 800,170, were recruits in training, men engaged in administrative services, and "indispensables." A large proportion of these 800,000 recruits under training would before long become fit to send overseas if wanted. Upwards of 100,000 of them were lads under 19 years old. A pledge had been given in Parliament regarding these that only in the event of a grave national emergency should they be sent out of the country before they had completed their nineteenth year. After the March offensive 19 was reduced to 18½. Here we followed the example of Germany and France. Altogether it seemed reasonable to assume that if a crisis arose, a far larger number than 449,000 in all could be supplied from the Home Army to the Expeditionary forces, especially since the military bogey of a German invasion of Britain had now been definitely laid.

In addition to these large forces of British troops retained on British soil there were also in Britain, belonging to the Overseas contingents, 8,324 officers, of whom 4,493 were fit for general service, and 187,491 other ranks (excluding permanent cadres), of whom 41,065 were recorded as "available."

It has been suggested that I was responsible for keeping these great masses of men at home because of my "obsession" as to the danger of a German invasion. I have never entertained such a fear. In fact I always regarded it as a bogey invented by those

*No obsession
with invasion
peril*

who wanted to re-establish permanent conscription. I agreed with the decision of the Asquith Government that the Germans could not possibly accomplish more than a rush and a raid without artillery support.

Thus apart from any further contribution which might still be squeezed from the numbers of "A"

*Committee's
recommendations for
economising
man-power* men still in civilian occupations, it is evident that the Army authorities had under their hand, already in khaki, a quite considerable body of troops on which to draw for reinforcing their Overseas Armies,

and all they had to do was to make the best use of them. On the whole, therefore, the Committee were justified in coming to the conclusion that, with the enormous reserves of men trained or in training at home and with arrangements the Ministry of National Service had made and was still making to increase these numbers, our forces ought to be able to hold out in 1918 until the Americans turned equality into decisive superiority, provided meanwhile certain measures were taken to economise losses and make the fullest and most skilful use of the men available. Among the measures proposed by the Man-power Committee were that every effort should be made to avoid the appalling waste of man-power hitherto sustained, by the adoption of suitable strategy and tactics, and by the improvement of the defences ; that the divisions should be cut down from four battalions per brigade to three ; that the bulk of the cavalry should be broken up and used to reinforce the tank corps and flying corps ; and that the Home Army should be drawn on much more heavily to reinforce the Overseas Armies, and also to provide the "B" category men required for auxiliary work. The French and Germans put this class in

the trenches to hold the quieter parts of the line. The Germans had 14 divisions of Landsturm troops in the line. Both Haig and the War Office declined to follow this course. They would have nothing but "A" men for the war zones. In the course of the summer of 1918 on the advice of Foch this objection was dropped by our Generals with excellent results. The "B" men did well.

There was comfort in knowing that the needs of the Army if serious, were not so desperate as some of the figures submitted were intended to convey, and that a good deal could be done to improve the prospects by a verification of War Office statistics, and the rest achieved by a more efficient utilisation of the existing supply of man-power in the Army itself. When the Committee turned to examine the residue of man-power still left in civilian work in this country, they found that it was very nearly exhausted, and certainly could not be expected to furnish that 600,000 "A" recruits, additional to lads reaching 18, and lower-category men, for which the Army was asking.

There were still $3\frac{1}{2}$ million men of military age in civilian occupations in Great Britain; but of these only 950,000 were fit for general service. Of these 950,000, some 355,000 were in munition works and shipyards, 330,000 were in coal-mining or agriculture, 187,000 were in railways, transport and public utility occupations, and the balance of 78,000 men were a carefully combed remnant in a variety of positions where hitherto they had been considered indispensable by the tribunals. From the practical point of view it would have been impossible to remove all these men from their jobs. On the one hand, much of the work was

*Scanty
residue of
man-power
still available*

Statistics

of a heavy nature, for which men physically fit were essential. Fit men were needed for the mercantile marine, for shipbuilding and ship-repairing yards, for coal-mining, forges, rolling mills, heavy armament manufacture, for hewing timber, agriculture, railways and other industries and utilities. Further, numbers of men fit for general service had been retained perforce in their positions because they were highly skilled and irreplaceable—skilled engineers, key men in industry, commerce, finance, public administration—and were more valuable to the nation where they were than in shouldering a rifle. Not a few had been brought back from the Army to the factories by the Government for that reason. Indeed, at this very time we were scouring the Army for another 20,000 skilled shipwrights, urgently required for our shipbuilding programme, to make good the losses inflicted by the German submarines. Our shipping, always vital to the nation for its very existence, was about to play in 1918 an even more spectacular part in the promotion of the Allied victory by bringing over American troops to France. By making that feat of transport possible, the men retained in the shipyards or brought back to them from the Army contributed a reinforcement of many times their number to the forces in France.

Thus although dilution, the substitution of women workers and of men medically rejected by the Army examiners for those who could be recruited for general service, was being steadily pressed forward, there were numbers of tasks and of men to which it could not be successfully applied. The Army authorities became ruffled and red with impatience at the sight of any fit man not in khaki. But the Army authorities had

*Limits of
dilution*

not to shoulder the responsibility for governing the country and maintaining all its manifold essential activities—a fact which neither they nor some of their historians and apologists seem to have realised.

Further, in considering this question of dilution of skilled occupations, and the removal of "A" men, whose well-paid jobs would be taken by others less fit for military service, it has to be borne in mind, as I pointed out in a previous chapter* that Britain had not the same background of social training as Continental nations for the acceptance of universal compulsory military service. On the Continent, lads grew up from early childhood with the knowledge that in due time they must unquestioningly take their place in the Army and serve their time there, and that if a national emergency arose, they would be recalled to the Army as a matter of course, whatever work they might be doing. But in Britain the Army had always been a voluntary service. The notion that men should be forced to throw up well-paid work to engage in this riskiest, worst paid and most tethered of all professions, however unwillingly, was quite a new principle, with no backing of social tradition, while the labour dilution which was its corollary was equally a menace to the slowly built fabric of trade unionist regulations designed to protect the worker against inroads on his craft. The Unions had accepted such measures, I will not say grudgingly, but with misgivings and only because they were forced by the extremity of the war emergency. Patriotism is the last stand of every creed and these Union leaders conceded to the needs of the country what they would not surrender to any other appeal.

* cf. Vol. II, Chap. XXIII : "The Coming of Conscription."

We had to apply these concessions carefully, with tact not tyranny. Entire nations are not yet—not even in war—on the parade ground where Ministers can bellow at them orders which must be implicitly and promptly obeyed on peril of the guard-room. There are countries moving in that direction. But in the days of Imperial autocracy even the docile Russian rebelled in the end against such a disciplinary exaction.

Thus in reckoning the maximum limit of further levies which might be made upon the “ A ” men still in civilian callings we had to take care not only to avoid crippling essential services, but also to preserve peace on the home front. The residue of fit men in the ranks of labour consisted in large part either of those who had not felt called upon to volunteer for the Army, or had been deterred from doing so by pressure from the management of the concerns which could not have been kept going without their help. To these must be added those who had actually volunteered, and even in some cases had gone out to France, but had been sent back to mine or factory or dockyard because their services there were judged indispensable. These latter men did not want to be played about with. They were mainly volunteers. Had they been left in the Army, they would have done their duty there. Being released from it without their own effort, and told they could best serve their country at home, they would have felt naturally aggrieved if they had again been dragged out and thrust into khaki, labelled as conscripts and flung into unhealthy salients to spend their winter. The squeezing process in Germany of the last few months of the War was driving tens of thousands into desertion

*Keeping
peace on the
home front*

and ere many months passed it drove hundreds of thousands into rebellion which overthrew the throne. Some of the more powerful Trade Unions were showing signs of becoming resistant to the pressure for combing out more of their men for the front.

Thus in weighing up the question of what further fit men we could withdraw from civilian services for the Army and Navy we had on the one hand to examine what number could be taken without causing a material disorganisation or breakdown of essential industries, and on the other, how far we could revive press gang tactics by pouncing on eligible individuals here and there without provoking a psychological reaction that would create more disastrous trouble than the number of men obtained would be worth. Government is in part a science but it is more of an art. To be a success there must be not only regulation but understanding.

The Cabinet Committee on Man-power came to the conclusion that as regards the relative urgency of demand between the different essential services, first place must be given to the Navy. As I have already noted, its maintenance was clearly of supreme importance to the nation and to the Allies. If it failed, overwhelming disaster to the Allied cause was inevitable. With it was bracketed the Air Force. The development of aviation since the War had given this branch of the Service an importance beyond the conjecture of any military teacher before the War. Supremacy in the air had become one of the essentials of victory. This arm had also an importance of its own for the defence of our cities against hostile attack. Shipping, which included shipbuilding and repairing as well as manning, came next. For feeding and

*Committee's
order of
priority*

supplying the nation, for carrying troops, munitions and rations to the different theatres of war, for assisting our Allies, for bringing over American troops, it was vital to make good the shipping shortage which the submarine war had created. Of hardly less importance was to be reckoned the manufacture of the mechanism and munitions of war. This included coal production for ourselves and the Allies. After these in order of merit were placed food production and timber felling.

While in this list the requirements of the fighting personnel of the Navy and Air Force were given absolute priority over all other services, *Numbers to be combed out* the supply of man-power to the other essential services was made subject to the charge that the Minister of National Service should economise it with the utmost care, in order to make all the provision possible for release of men for the Army. After careful examination of the labour schedules, the Committee on Man-power came to the conclusion that by carrying out some sort of general post with the available labour force in Britain, tending to bring about further dilution of the supply with women and with men of low medical categories, it would be possible to secure in 1918 for the forces from the ranks of men of military age then in civilian life, a further 150,000 men of category "A" and 100,000 men of lower categories.

Of these, they proposed to allot 50,000 category "A" men to the Navy, leaving 100,000 category "A" men and 100,000 men of lower categories for the Army. While these second hundred thousand were not up to the medical standard of fitness for general service, there were a number of tasks to be done in the Army which they could perform, thus

releasing from those sources fit men to be taken into the line and increase our combatant strength.

Thus, while the Army was asking for 600,000 recruits of "A" category from the civilian population during 1918, the conclusion of the Committee was that it could only see the possibility by the most drastic combing of securing 100,000 "A" men and another 100,000 men of lower categories in addition to 120,000 youths reaching military age during the year. Reviewing their problem in retrospect, it seems quite clear that they could not at that stage in the War have promised more. The 600,000 demanded by the Army was, for reasons I have given, in any case a figure which could not be justified on the most superficial examination. When the German attack in March, 1918, broke our front, and it became a life and death issue to send abroad every man capable of bearing arms, we slashed desperately at some of our vital war industries, and made encroachments upon the scanty man-power left at home, which nothing but the need for restoring confidence in a momentary panic created by a great defeat could have justified. We got few more recruits for the War, though the effort did help to calm excited nerves. Cuts were then carried out that would have been psychologically impossible previously—cuts to which organised labour would have refused to submit but for the spectacular urgency of the situation. The last available men were thrust into the Army. But even when these desperate expedients were resorted to, it was not found possible to secure any really considerable additional numbers. As I have stated, the Man-power Committee had proposed a total recruitment of "A" category men in 1918 for Navy

*Recruits
available for
the Army*

and Army (other than boys to be conscripted on reaching the age of 18) of 150,000. The actual number of adult "A" men recruited in 1918 was 284,649—an increase of less than 135,000 over the original estimate, after using the maximum pressure and taking the maximum risks.

A great deal of nonsense had been talked, and many foolish charges brought against the Government of failing to provide a larger number of recruits in the early part of 1918. A somewhat flagrant example of this is a comment contained in the Official History* in a footnote giving the numbers of troops sent out to France in January-August, 1918. The writer points out that a total of 548,327 "A" men were sent to France during those eight months, and draws the following curious conclusion :—

*Unwarranted
charges of
withholding
men*

"It is obvious that the British Armies in France could have been brought up to full establishment before 21st March without unduly weakening forces elsewhere had the Government so willed."

This is an amazing statement to be made by a writer with access to the Official Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire. In the first place, he must be aware that those 548,327 "A" men were not obtainable by recruitment, however much the Government might will it. The great bulk of them had to be, and were, provided by the Army authorities from the troops already in khaki by the beginning of 1918; troops that were under their hand in this country, ready trained or in course of training, or

* "Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1918," Vol. I, p. 52.

recovering from wounds or sickness. So it would seem that if the Army historian is entitled to make any criticism in this connection, he should direct it against the Army authorities.

But in the second place, it is a grotesque *gaffe* on the part of a military writer to suggest that because men were actually sent out in August, they could equally well have been sent out in March. Of the total troops in this country in March, 1918, including Regular Army, Territorial Force and Overseas contingents from the Dominions, upwards of 700,000 were "A" category officers and men; but of these, only 227,545 officers and men were shown by the War Office returns to be trained and available for dispatch overseas, including all the youths of under 19 who had finished their necessary training. The remainder of the "A" men here at that time were recruits not yet trained, and sick and wounded not yet fully recovered or not "hardened" after recovery in preparation for sending out again. Each month saw a further batch ready for dispatch overseas. But the Official Statistics place it beyond dispute that the men drafted overseas between April and August were not available for that purpose in March. The writer of the Official History must have been aware of these facts or he must have been too busy writing about events to examine the facts—in which case writers are apt to fall back on gossip. He must have known that there was no spectacular expansion of belated recruiting by the Government to bear witness to an earlier neglect; and that the fact of drafts being sent out in August could not be taken as evidence that they were available in March.

The accusation, often made, that at this period

the British Government was starving the Army of men
Government's will not bear a moment's examination
recruiting if the official figures published by the War
success : Office are studied. Let us consider those
statistics figures in regard to :—

(a) The total strength of the British Army recruited from the United Kingdom.

(b) The total strength of the Expeditionary Forces in all war theatres.

(c) The grand total of British forces of all kinds throughout the Empire.

(a) In March, 1918, the total strength of the British Army, Regular and Territorial, raised in this country —excluding all Dominion, Colonial, Indian and native troops—was 3,889,990.*
U.K. forces This was the colossal giant which the War Cabinet are accused of having reduced to a skeleton army. *It was the highest total strength which the British Army ever reached. At no time in the whole course of the War were there so many men from this country in the ranks of the Army at home and overseas as at the date of the German offensive in March, 1918. It was the supreme moment of the War, the supreme moment of British history, so far as the massing of our sons into the Army was concerned. Despite all the terrible slaughter of the Somme, and the awful massacres of Passchendaele, our military authorities had under their command in March, 1918, more men than ever before, drawn entirely from the population of this little island.*

(b) Similarly, the total British strength in all the

* "Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire, 1914-1920," p. 231.

theatres of war—our total Expeditionary forces, including Dominion and other Overseas contingents, but excluding coloured labour units, reached in March, 1918, its high-water mark, with a total of 2,834,690.* *This, too, was the record figure for the military effort of the British Empire at any moment during the War.* It included some 253,000 Indian and African troops.

The Expeditionary forces on the Western Front had been sorely depleted by the casualties of the Flanders campaign, which had calamitously exceeded the forecast of probable losses for which we had provided. On the eve of that campaign, on 1st August, 1917, the total strength of the B.E.F., France, was 2,044,627* (exclusive of coloured labour units)—the highest figure it reached. You cannot quickly train men and draft them across to replace casualties totalling nearly 400,000. But by 1st March, 1918, the total strength of the B.E.F., France, together with the troops sent along from France to the Italian Front (which the Italians offered to make up by an equal number of their troops) amounted to 2,019,773*—within 25,000 of the pre-Passchendaele total.

(c) The grand total of all the forces of the Empire, at home, in the various war theatres, in India and garrisoning ports, reached its maximum in March, 1918, with 5,559,573.† This included 4,982,254 troops, British, Dominions, India, etc., and 577,319 coloured labour. Each of these totals was the highest ever attained in the whole course of the War. It was an immense effort for a commonwealth where universal military service was an unknown tradition in the

* "Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire, 1914-1920," Table facing p. 64.

† *ibid.*, p. 34.

lives of the people and where this supreme sacrifice of liberty for millions and of home and life for multitudes was incurred in a war waged for the independence of another nation. There was no invader on our soil devastating our towns and villages as in France. We had not, as Italy had, territory and a population which belonged to our race and spoke our language, to be redeemed from a foreign yoke. We fought to vindicate international right which had been outraged by a wrong inflicted on a small country which we were covenanted to protect.

In face of these facts and figures, all of them given in the Official Statistics issued by the War Office, the charge that in the spring of 1918 the Army was being starved of men can be seen to be not only false but silly.

CHAPTER LXXII (*continued*)

THE PROBLEM OF MAN-POWER

2. NEGOTIATIONS WITH LABOUR AND IRELAND

It was by no means an easy matter to carry out the proposal of the Man-power Committee for recruiting a further 150,000 "A" men and 100,000 men of lower categories from the remaining industrial population. The men of military age were an often-sifted residue, all of them holding pledges of absolute or conditional exemption from military service ; and to call up a large, fresh batch of them meant anxious diplomacy and frank consultation with the leaders of the Trade Unions. Sir Auckland Geddes, the Minister of National Service, had a general conference with the leaders of Labour, which he had to adjourn early in January, in order to see how far he could reach agreement with each trade union group about the measures it would be necessary to take in their particular industry to carry through this recruiting programme. The General Conference was resumed on 18th January, 1918, when about 350 delegates attended at the Central Hall, Westminster, from all parts of the country.

The chair at this gathering was taken by Mr. George Barnes, the representative of Labour in the Cabinet, and two other Labour holders of Ministerial office,

Mr. G. H. Roberts and Mr. Clynes, were also present. At the previous meeting of this Conference on 5th January I had attended and delivered the speech outlining the peace aims of the Allies which is reproduced in Chapter LXX, Appendix II (page 2515). I also addressed this second meeting of delegates about the situation, and gave the reasons which made it necessary to take further steps to extract men for the Army and Navy from amongst those in their ranks who had been hitherto exempted.

I began by urging the fullest frankness between the Government and the representatives of Labour, and promised to answer, at the end of my speech, any questions on general policy. *My speech to the T.U.C.* I then proceeded :—

“ With regard to the proposals of the Government, let me say this at the outset as to the method. There are no other alternatives for raising men except either raising the military age, as they have done in Austria, where it is 55, or sending wounded men back and back again into the battle line. . . . As to the urgency of the need, no man standing like my colleagues and myself on the watch-tower can deny it. Unless the need had been urgent, we should not have brought forward this demand now. . . . The Government view is this : It would be folly to withdraw men from industries one hour sooner than the need arose. On the other hand, it would be treason to the State, treason to our country, treason to democracy, treason to the cause of freedom, if when the need did arise we did not make the demand.”

I pointed out that unless we succeeded in resisting

the military power of Prussia we could never hope to obtain from the Kaiser and Ludendorff even the most moderate terms that the most pacific of us could dream of accepting. It was not a question of fighting on to gain some big imperialist aim. I had already indicated our peace terms in my speech to them a fortnight before, and President Wilson had almost at the same time put forward substantially the same demand. They had been received in all the Allied countries with acclaim, except perhaps by extremists who thought they should have been stiffer.

“What has been their reception in Germany? I beg you to consider this, especially those who think that we are responsible for perpetuating this horror. I would not have this war for a second on my soul if I could stop it honourably. . . . There has been no response from any man in any position in Germany that indicates a desire on the part of the ruling powers in that land to approach the problem in a spirit of equity.

We demanded the restoration of Belgium. Is there one man here who would make peace without the complete restoration of Belgium and reparation for its wrongs? [Cries of ‘No!’] Is there one man? [‘No!’] I would like to see him stand up. Is there one man who would do it? What is the answer from Germany? There has been but one answer, and it came from von Tirpitz’s soul—‘Never!’”

*Our terms
refused by
Germany*

The same answer, I pointed out, was given to the suggestion of the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine, and to the demand that Mesopotamia and Palestine

should not be handed back to Turkish tyranny. To the peace aims formulated by the British Trade Unions themselves, there had not been a single favourable response from anyone in Germany with authority to speak. In fact, there had been no civilian statement from Germany at all. Von Kuhlmann had been kept silent by the War Lords, whose only answer to civilisation would be given from the cannon's mouth.

“Do not let us harbour any delusions. . . . You might as well stop fighting unless you are going to do it well. If you are not going to do it with all your might, it is real murder of gallant fellows who have stood there for three years [Hear, hear]. . . . If there are men who say that they will not go into the trenches, then the men who are in the trenches have a right to say, ‘Neither will we remain here!’ Supposing they did it, would that bring the War to an end? Yes, it would. But what sort of an end?”

The Russian soldiers, I reminded them, had done that ; and the Germans had proceeded to take Riga and the Russian islands. If we stopped now, we should leave Britain as well as France at the mercy of the most relentless military autocracy the world had ever seen. We could not turn Hindenburg out of Belgium with trade union resolutions, but we could with trade union guns and trade unionists behind them. Only by such means could we carry to triumph those great aims which had been put forward alike by the Trade Unionists, the Government and President Wilson as the objects for which we were committed to fight.

*Necessity of
fighting for
our rights*

"Let us harbour no delusions. We must take the world as it is, and the story of democracy is this: no democracy has ever long survived the failure of its adherents to be ready to die for it. . . . If one profession, one trade, one section, or one class in a community claims to be immune from obligations which are imposed upon the rest, that is a fundamental travesty of the principles of democracy. . . . We are fighting now against the privilege claimed by a military caste. Democracy must mean that the people of all classes . . . must merge their privileges and their rights in the common stock. . . . My own conviction is this, the people must either go on or go under."

At the end of my speech I invited questions, and a number were put, the majority of them bearing upon the issue of whether peace negotiations were possible at this stage, and whether any good end could be served by a meeting of British and German Socialist and Labour representatives at Stockholm or elsewhere. In reply to this question which recurred in several guises, I pointed out that ultimately a peace could only be negotiated by the accredited representatives of a country's Government. The great democracies, America and France, as well as Italy and Britain, all took that view.

Questions

"... It is a fundamental misconception of democracy that any section, however powerful, really represents the whole of the people. Whoever goes there to speak and to negotiate must represent the whole of the country, and not merely a part of it."

No sectional negotiations

I said that I had examined this question very carefully, with an original prejudice in favour of encouraging such sectional conferences ; but had been driven to conclude that it would be a very dangerous experiment. If you let the Socialist sections meet to confer on peace terms, you would have to let other sections do the same—the financiers of Britain and of Germany, the industrialists, merchants and so on. It would all end in confusion. The only effective way was for the people of each country to see that their Government represented their views, and then leave it to negotiate the peace.

A delegate inquired whether I would give an undertaking that the production of armaments here should be nationalised, and private profiteering in these engines of destruction brought to an end. My reply was :—

*Armament
nationalisation*

“ All I can say is that, speaking for myself, I am entirely in sympathy with that proposition. I do not think there ought to be any pecuniary incentive to encourage armaments in the world, and I am entirely in sympathy with the spirit of that question.”

Another question raised the issue of our policy in regard to Alsace-Lorraine. To this I replied :—

“ I stated the view of the Government, I think, quite clearly last time. My view is that the people of this country will stand by the people of France. It is a question for them to decide. You must remember this is not really a question of territory to them. It has been a question of vital principle. It has been like an open sore in their side for nearly

*Alsace-
Lorraine*

50 years. They have never been able to live in peace during the whole of that time, and their view undoubtedly is that you cannot have peace in France until you have settled this question once and for ever ; and if you cannot have peace in France, you won't have peace in Europe. You must settle this question unless you are going to have a series of wars in Europe."

Another point which clearly preoccupied the minds of the Labour delegates was the contribution which wealth ought to make to our war effort. Was I going to conscript it ?

I answered that "in no country and in no war has wealth been as heavily taxed for war purposes as in this country. Even at this moment the taxation of wealth is higher here than in any other belligerent country, not even excluding Germany, and if my questioner will just look at all the budgets of the world, past and present, he will find we have gone farther on that road than any other country. I do not say that we have come to the end of the path yet." In another reply to a question about taxation as opposed to borrowing, I pointed out that we had maintained a higher percentage of taxation to borrowing than any other government.

Finally, I assured my hearers that we were at pains to ensure that the war aims of America and the Allies should be consolidated as fully as possible, and that it was our purpose so to settle the peace of the world that it should be possible to do away with conscription, not only here, but in every other country. But unless the strength of militarism was really broken, that would be impossible.

This frank discussion ended in a really good understanding between the Government and the representatives of Labour, and enabled us to secure their agreement for the further measures of recruitment which were necessary to provide the additional numbers of men for the Navy and Army proposed by the Man-power Committee.

A Bill to enact the legislation requisite for enabling us to cancel exemptions and conduct a further comb-out of our man-power had already been introduced by Sir Auckland Geddes, the Minister of National Service, on 14th January. After this understanding had been reached with the representatives of Labour we were able to press the measure rapidly through its further stages, and on 6th February, 1918, it received the Royal Assent. The principal objection raised to it in Parliament came from the Ulster Members, who wanted to include conscription for Ireland in its terms. Sir Auckland Geddes explained that :—

“ The reason why the Government excluded any reference to Ireland from this Bill was that in their considered opinion, after fully investigating the matter, they considered that to have included a proposal to apply compulsory military service to Ireland would not have helped on the War. . . . It is not at this time possible to risk delay for weeks and months in getting the measures which we propose into force if we are to obtain the men the Army requires.”*

This was, however, a question which was to cause

* Official Report, 17th January, 1918, Vol. 101, Col. 579.

us a great deal of trouble during the remainder of the year.

When the great German offensive of March, 1918, drove in our front, we at once made plans for still more drastic measures to raise recruits.

*March
emergency
proposals*

At the War Cabinet of 25th March, Sir Auckland Geddes was asked to prepare at the earliest moment a short Bill which would give us powers to raise the age limit for military service to 50 or 55, to conscript the clergy and ministers of religion, to send conscientious objectors abroad for labour services, and to extend conscription to Ireland. This last question gave rise to serious differences of opinion in the Cabinet, as it subsequently did in and out of Parliament. The divisions did not altogether follow Party lines. Bonar Law was just as doubtful as I was about the wisdom of the project. But other Unionist members of the War Cabinet were insistent upon it, and we learned that Labour would be restive at the further drastic extensions we proposed if the manhood of Ireland were left untouched. Mr. Duke, the Chief Secretary, was strongly opposed to it as a method of recruiting the Army, and on 27th March he laid before us a Memorandum from General Mahon, the G.O.C., Irish Command, with additions inserted in *italics* by General Byrne, the head of the Royal Irish Constabulary. This ran :—

“ Conscription can be enforced, but with *the greatest* difficulty. It will be *bitterly* opposed by the *united* Nationalists and the clergy. The present time is the worst for it since I have been in Ireland, because the cry will be : ‘ England down, Ireland’s opportunity.’ Some of the difficulties

would be *organised strikes dislocating the life of the country*, railway, post office and telegraph communications cut. There are fewer troops

General Mahon's memorandum in Ireland than there have been for some time. More have to be taken.

We would have to have additional troops for the time, at least two brigades (*? I think considerably more*). These I do not anticipate would be required for more than three months.

Ireland would have to be divided into several districts. It would be a question that will have to be considered if compulsion is put into force in the whole simultaneously, or district by district. But to render it feasible either way, the country must be put under some kind of military control. Law would have to be dropped, because ordinarily, for the first fortnight at least, there would be bloodshed and a great deal of suffering to the civil population in every way, and hardships.

The number of men we would get I cannot estimate. Ten months ago I estimated 160,000, with very liberal exemptions. It ought to be more now with increased age. I am of opinion that *some of the men when got would make good and reliable soldiers (a considerable number might be likely to give trouble)*. *The police would have to be concentrated into larger parties, thus curtailing their usefulness. Coast watching would be interfered with, also tillage.*

I would suggest that the first thing is to get all known leaders out of the way at once ; *extra troops should be on the spot simultaneously*, and everyone, irrespective of who he is, arrested on first sign of giving trouble.

These measures would be drastic, but the situation is serious, or it would not be considered necessary to have conscription at this inopportune time."

This document showed how grave were the objections felt by those in touch with the Irish situation to the introduction of conscription. We held a second Cabinet meeting that afternoon to discuss it further, and on the following morning, 28th March, I summoned Sir James Campbell, the Irish Lord Chief Justice, to the Cabinet, to give us his views. Sir Edward Carson, who had left the War Cabinet because of our decision to negotiate once more with the Irish Nationalist leaders for measures of Home Rule which would be acceptable to the Irish people as a whole, was also invited to be present to express his opinion.

*Views of
Campbell
and Carson* Sir James Campbell was clear that conscription could now be enforced in Ireland only at the cost of tremendous bloodshed, and the number of men worth getting whom it would yield would be very small. This verdict was of special interest, because Campbell had been a strong advocate of conscription for Ireland. Somewhat to our surprise, Sir Edward Carson agreed with him. He said he was forced to the conclusion, with much regret, that the result of conscription in Ireland would be such that its introduction was not worth contemplating, in view of the disturbances that would be caused. If, however, the British Government found themselves unable to get men from Great Britain without enforcing conscription in Ireland, the question became a very different one.

It is almost impossible to depict the complexities in which this issue of Irish conscription was wrapped.

At that time the Irish Convention was still sitting, and we were hoping that it would yield us some measure of agreement upon which we could proceed to frame and carry a Home Rule measure. For such a measure we could not hope for support from the Unionists unless they at least secured the *quid pro quo* of Irish conscription ; yet we were warned that if we announced our intention of proposing such conscription, the Convention would break up at once. Some of our advisers thought the conscripts we got would be useless—Mr. Duke thought we might as well enlist Germans ! The Army authorities, on the other hand, had few misgivings, and Haig thought there would be no trouble with the conscripts once he had them in France. Against the view that conscription would set Ireland ablaze was set the alternative view that removal of the young men there into the Army would cut the claws of the Sinn Fein movement. Irish conscription, especially if unaccompanied by Home Rule, would have a very damaging effect on public opinion in America. But if nothing was proposed in regard to it, I could see clearly that we could not hope to carry our Bill for raising the age limit to 50 or 55, and still further cutting down exemptions. Organised labour had intimated that it would bitterly resent the pressing through of a measure which combed out scores of thousands more of the members of Unions which had already contributed millions to the fighting forces, whilst we exempted the Irish peasantry which had done well out of the War and had given us nothing but trouble in return. After all, we were fighting

*Complexities
of the issue*

for the redemption of a small Catholic country whose independence had been crushed; and the Irish who were demanding self-government ought in return to be ready to make their contribution to this effort.

After carefully reviewing these conflicting views and considerations, we ultimately decided that we

Irish conscription and Home Rule to be simultaneous would not immediately enact Irish conscription, but we would insert in the Bill a provision authorising the Government to impose it by Order in Council.

We would also, but independently, press forward with a Home Rule measure for Ireland. We felt that if such a measure could reach the Statute Book by the time we had completed our arrangements for imposing Irish conscription, the worst difficulties confronting this step would be removed.

The new Military Service Bill was introduced on 9th April. It made all men under 51 liable to compulsory military service, with power to raise that limit by Order in Council to all men under 56. And it made further provisions for cancelling exemptions and limiting the power of tribunals to grant them. As regards Ireland, it provided that:—

“His Majesty may by Order in Council extend this Act to Ireland, and this Act if so extended shall, subject to such modifications and adaptations as may be made by the Order for the purpose of making it applicable to Ireland, have effect accordingly.”

The reactions to this measure were as confused in Parliament and the country as they had been in the Cabinet. The Southern Irish members, as had been expected, violently opposed the clause, though in

the Committee stage Mr. Devlin promised he would join up himself if we would bring the Irish Parliament into existence. Mr. Asquith

*Confused
reactions
of opinion*

also opposed it, though on account of the national emergency he said he would not carry his opposition into the lobby.

The National Liberal Federation Executive passed a resolution urging that a Home Rule measure should be passed through both Houses of Parliament at once and come into operation simultaneously with the application of the Military Service Act to Ireland. In the Committee stage, Mr. Bonar Law promised that the Government would do their best to achieve this. In the House of Lords, both Lord Lansdowne and Lord Londonderry opposed the application of conscription to Ireland. The Bill, however, passed safely through both Houses and received the Royal Assent on 18th April.

Before attempting to apply conscription to Ireland, we decided to make one more effort to secure recruits

*Attempt
to revive
voluntary
recruiting*

thence on a voluntary basis. Mr. Duke put forward a scheme for inviting each district, on the model of the old Militia ballot, to furnish a quota of recruits for

the Irish regiments. And we proceeded forthwith with the drafting of a Home Rule Bill. But while this was being prepared, we received information pointing to a German conspiracy to raise a fresh rebellion in Ireland, in which the Sinn Fein leaders were implicated. Evidence of this accumulated to

*Arrest of
rebel leaders*

a point which compelled us to take the action of having those leaders arrested and interned. Therewith all hope of carrying an agreed measure of Home

Rule passed for the time ; and the projected intro-

duction of conscription into Ireland was also suspended. We carried on with the scheme for regional recruiting campaigns, but without much success. From time to time we were pestered to go ahead with conscription ; as near the end as 21st October, 1918, Sir Henry Wilson spent the greater part of an evening vehemently urging it upon me. But I stood firmly by the arrangement we had agreed on, that conscription and Home Rule must be introduced together. If we could not carry the second, I would not impose the first.

It is idle to speculate what would have been the result had we seriously attempted to force conscription on Ireland in 1918. That we should have had bloodshed and violent resistance there can be no doubt, nor that American opinion would have been gravely exasperated. Whether we should have secured any adequate compensation for these evils in the form of recruits is harder to say. Happily, we succeeded in winning through without being forced to resort to so desperate an expedient. As I have already indicated, our final Military Service Act did not in fact achieve any very striking increase in the numbers of recruits ; apart from Ireland, no such increase was possible, for in spite of its critics the Government was already doing all that wisely could be done to supply our military effort with man-power. And the supply proved equal to the necessities of the situation. When the " Cease Fire " sounded in November, there were still more than 3½ million of the manhood of this island under arms ; our Navy held the mastery on water and our Mercantile Marine sailed the seven seas ; our factories were turning out munitions on a scale greater than

*Conscription
never enforced*

our fields and our granaries were filled with the harvest which the soil of this country had yielded for many seasons. In every one of the theaters where British troops had been called upon to make its indispensable contribution to the victory of the Allied cause, it had proved equal to its task.



M. Clemenceau and Mr. Lloyd George

CHAPTER LXXIII

CLEMENCEAU

CLEMENCEAU's predecessor, Painlevé, was a man of high intelligence and of considerable charm. He was a mixture of simplicity and astuteness which was attractive but perplexing. He was something of the academician in politics, and war is the most cunning of all pursuits. But if he was childlike in his ways, he was penetrating and shrewd in his judgments. He had a real insight into the heart of the problem. What he lacked was the manœuvring skill and the force necessary to convert his ideas into the action which sweeps aside obstacles, cuts through entanglements and bears down the intrigues of parliamentary and military cliques. He was too sensitive and too excitable for the position of a national leader in a bad crisis of a nation's destiny. He shrank from personal criticism with the dislike of the man who could not retort in kind. He could not have borne the shivering height of isolation in the most exalted and therefore the most exposed parliamentary position, had it not been shared, however irregularly, by a politician of a totally different type. His friend, Franklin Bouillon, became virtually his partner in the Premiership. He had none of the sensitiveness and the timidities of Painlevé. He was confident, ebullient, flamboyant. They both had courage of a

high order. But Painlevé lacked assurance. Franklin Bouillon had enough and to spare for both. But it is fair to say that he was not merely aggressive—he was also dauntless and within limits, effective. He ran Painlevé.

*Bouillon's
assurance*

He spoke for him and over him and instead of him at interviews and consultations and conferences. At the Rapallo Conference Painlevé hardly had a look in. He managed to interject a few rapid observations, but the torrential Bouillon, under the guise of interpreting Painlevé, swept his Chief on one side and declaimed a series of speeches of his own on every topic that arose.

But a time came when Painlevé had to stand alone and speak for himself. When the murmurs of the couloirs rose into a growl and he knew he would soon have to face an assembly angry with events for which he was not responsible, but which he had failed to control, he literally cowered at the prospect. He knew that he could not dominate a gathering which great orators like Viviani and Briand had often failed to quell. When the discussion that sealed his fate was impending he literally fled to England, ostensibly on a mission to me as British Prime Minister, but in reality to enjoy a few days' shelter from the rising storm. He spent a week-end with me at Chequers. He was uneasy, distrait and unhappy. I was sorry for him, because he was a good fellow. He knew he had done his best for his country. He was convinced that he was on the right line to save it. But he also understood that nothing would save him from the humiliation of being trampled upon as a failure by an infuriated assembly that found France preparing to face another year of war with no better

*Painlevé
falls*

prospect of victory than at the end of any other campaign. He fell, and with him, France seemed to have exhausted its waiting list of possible and seasoned Premiers. Viviani, Briand, Millerand, Ribot, Painlevé—they had all been tried and found wanting. Then came a dramatic change which had a decisive effect on the conduct of the War.

There was only one man left, and it is not too much to say that no one wanted him. The President, Poincaré, disliked him. He had insulted every prominent politician in France and conciliated none. He had no party or group attached to him. He was the Ishmael of French politics. I once said of him that he loved France but hated all Frenchmen. That is a substantially fair account of his personal attitude throughout his career. He was nevertheless much the most arresting and powerful personality in the arena of French politics during the Third Republic. He was a deadly controversialist who had brought down one Minister after another, with his piercing and pertinacious sword. The men out of whom Ministries were composed he held in the utmost contempt.

His scorn for them was all the more withering because it was partly justifiable and entirely genuine. He counted even Gambetta a theatrical sham, and he stripped him of the trappings of his greatness. Briand he despised as a mellifluous ranter of turgid commonplaces. Poincaré he could not abide. I never heard him speak with respect of any French politician except Jaurès, the great Socialist leader, and he was dead. Once upon a time he had crossed swords with Jaurès in a memorable debate and he had learnt to admire his intellectual quality. As for the

*Clemenceau
unpopular*

*His contempt
for his
contemporaries*

rest, he held them all in unmitigated derision. When you asked his opinion, as I often did, of some one or other of them, he concentrated his reply either into a contemptuous ejaculation (not always publishable) or into a fierce snort. In his estimation they were just flabby and flashy Parliamentarians and nothing more. That meant he considered they were merely adepts at all the arts and crafts of the political game, either in or out of Parliament. They talked the jargon that won or held votes or *applaudissements*. They could manœuvre themselves or their groups into Ministerial offices. But they were not doers. When they got into office, the most hardworking amongst them only toiled at Minutes or despatches submitted to them by bureaucrats whose main purpose was not so much to solve a problem finally as to get it disposed of for the time being. When they attended Conferences, these parliamentary leaders regarded it as a triumph if at the end they were able to say there was an *accord complet*, and could get an agreed *communiqué* to the Press which implied a great deal to the general public but meant nothing to the initiated. Clemenceau knew them all well—too well—and held them in utter disdain. He made no allowance for the fact that they all served to the utmost of their capacity, and even Clemenceau could do no more than that.

Clemenceau was a master of words. No orator of his day had a more perfect command and choice of word and phrase. But he was pre-eminently a man of action. His scorn was for the men who thought words a substitute for deeds and not a stimulus to deeds. He was not always fair even to the doers whom he personally disliked. I always thought him

*A man
of action*

unjust to Albert Thomas, who was an organiser and worker of the first rank.

During the whole of the War, he had criticised and condemned everybody and everything. His newspaper had been suppressed. He started another. It had no circulation—except in the quarters that mattered to him.

An old growler

Deputies and Senators read every word of it. He made few speeches, but in parliamentary Committees he was a terror not so much to cvildoers as to those who, in my opinion, are worse in an emergency—the nondoers. For three years no one thought of him as a possible War Premier. He was a growler, and an old growler at that. He was 78 years of age. He had only just recovered from a bad operation when the War started. Shortly before he was called upon to form a Ministry, I ventured to suggest to a prominent French Deputy that Clemenceau ought to be given his chance. He scoffed at the idea. The Tiger was in his opinion, and in that of every trotter through the couloirs of the Chamber of Deputies, clean out of the reckoning. I pointed out that shortly before the War he had held office, and turned out to be one of the strongest Prime Ministers of the Republic. My informant replied that he was no longer the man he used to be. He was now only a petulant and querulous old fellow. Then

The lobbies call for him

all of a sudden there came a cry from the lobbies of the Chamber of Deputies. "Why not give the Tiger a turn? If he fails, as he probably will, it will stop his snarling, and we can then try someone else, and we can silence him by an allusion to his own failure." His success was attributable to a desire for his discomfiture. These whisperings reached the ears of

Poincaré and he listened to them. Hence the greatest War Ministry in the whole long succession of French Cabinets during this conflict. At 78 Clemenceau began the most notable episode in his strenuous and stormy career.

As he exerted such an influence on the course of events I should like here to give my personal impression of this remarkable man.

The first time I ever met M. Clemenceau was at Carlsbad in 1910. I was having tea with Mr. T. P. O'Connor in his rooms. M. Clemenceau was known to be taking his annual cure, and I was anxious to meet him. T. P. arranged a meeting. Soon after I arrived there bustled into the room a short, broad-shouldered and full-chested man, with an aggressive and rather truculent countenance, illuminated by a pair of brilliant and fierce eyes set deeply under overhanging eyebrows. The size and hardness of his great head struck me. It seemed enormous, but there was no dome of benevolence, reverence, or kindliness. It was an abnormally large head with all the sympathetic qualities flattened out. I am not now analysing the man, but giving my first impressions of his appearance. He looked the part of the Tiger—the man-eating Tiger who had hunted down Ministry after Ministry, and rent them with his terrible claws. He came into the room with short, quick steps. He was then seventy years of age, and his greatest days were to come seven or eight years later.

We were introduced and he greeted me none too genially. I was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and was doing my utmost to urge an understanding with Germany on the question of naval construction. I feared war was inevitable, unless such an under-

standing could be reached. M. Clemenceau referred to my efforts with scornful disapproval. His hatred of Germany had a concentrated ferocity which I had never seen before, not even among the most violent of our British Germanophobes. Their hostility to Germany always seemed to be calculated and histrionic—his was of the blood. Later on I understood it better.

My first interview with M. Clemenceau was not a success. He made it clear that he thoroughly disapproved of me. Had I never seen him again, I should have recalled him as a powerful but a disagreeable and rather bad-tempered old savage. It was years—eventful years—after this meeting that I discovered his real fascination: his wit, his playfulness, the hypnotic interest of his arresting and compelling personality. And a day was to come—sooner than any one of us had anticipated—when events occurred that explained to me his apprehension of the menace as well as his detestation of the arrogance of German imperialism.

I remember driving with him back to Paris from the historic meeting at the Trianon Palace Hotel, Versailles, after he had handed to M. Brockdorff-Rantzau and the German delegates the draft of the Peace Treaty. As we passed the ruins of the palace of St. Cloud, which had been burned by the Germans in 1871, he told me how he remembered seeing the blaze. He was Mayor of Montmartre during the siege of Paris, and from the heights of his mayoral domain he witnessed the destruction of the famous château. That event seemed to have burned itself into his memory even

more than the scenes of hunger and privation to which he so effectively ministered.

On this occasion he spoke with unwonted placidity about the events of 1870, rather like a man in whom the internal fires of revenge had at last been quenched by the cooling draught of victory. There is only one incident of 1871 of which he spoke to me with emotion, and that was of the poignant scene in the French Assembly when Jules Favre came straight from an interview with Bismarck to report to the deputies the nature of the terms demanded, and the ruthlessness with which the triumphant Chancellor had treated the supplication of the French delegates for some amelioration in the demands. Tears came into M. Clemenceau's eyes—for the first and only time in my intercourse with him—as he described how “the old man (Favre),” in attempting to describe the harshness of the conqueror, broke down in the tribune and wept. I then understood something of M. Clemenceau's hatred of the Germans. They had not only invaded France, defeated her armies, occupied her capital, humbled her pride, but in the hour of victory had treated her with an insolence which for 50 years had rankled in the heart of this fierce old patriot. When I met him at Carlsbad the sore was still stinging him into anger. He was essentially an angry man. Those who read his relentless words on the death of Herr Stresemann will know that not even victory had completely stamped out the embers of vengeance in the bosom of this terrible volcano of rumbling and surging hatreds—personal, national, political and religious.

That he should have succeeded as War Minister is not a matter of surprise. He possessed restless energy, indomitable courage and a gift of infecting

others with his own combativeness and confidence. I know nothing of his qualities as an administrator or
A successful organiser. The greatest tasks of organ-
War Minister isation were over before he took office at
the end of 1917. A combination of energy,
courage and common sense was needed
at that hour, and he possessed these three attributes
in an exceptional degree.

As for his courage, there is no better illustration of
it than the characteristic story which is told of him
when it was proposed that the French
His courage Chamber of Deputies should move to
Bordeaux at the beginning of the War.
The Germans were within a few miles of
Paris, and President, senators and deputies thought
it better to get out of range of the German guns ere
it was too late. M. Clemenceau refused to go, and
when he was asked whether he did not think they
ought to leave Paris his answer was "Yes, we are too
far from the front."

His courage was never questioned by even his
bitterest foes, but they were not as ready to acknow-
ledge his wisdom. When he was not in a passion,
or when his personal or political prejudices were not
engaged—and he had his lucid intervals of com-
posure—he took as sane, sensible, and penetrating a
view of a situation as any man I ever met.

By conviction and temperament he was an inexor-
able cynic. He had no belief in the ultimate victory
of right. His essential creed—if he had
His any—was that history demonstrated
cynicism clearly that in the end might invariably
triumphed over abstract justice. In fact,
as he once put it bluntly in the course of a conversa-
tion, "Might is right." His faith was in organised

and well-directed force. It was in the interest of humanity that strength should prevail over weakness. One of the most piquant passages of arms between himself and President Wilson was one in which he reminded the American idealist that the United States of America would never have come into existence without force, and that but for force it would have fallen to pieces half a century ago.

The last time I saw him as Prime Minister was after the defeat of his candidature for the Presidency of the

*His last
defeat* Republic. It was for him defeat accompanied by every circumstance of humiliation, and he felt it deeply. It was the first

and only occasion on which I ever saw this brave old man betray any feeling over a personal hurt to himself. He had not sought nomination. On the contrary, he had resisted up to the last moment pressure brought to bear upon him to allow his name to go forward. He did not want it. He only gave in because he was assured by many who afterwards betrayed him that it was in the interests of France that he should remain at the helm until the peace was firmly established and France had recovered from her wounds.

It was represented to him that the unique and commanding influence he had won, not only in France but throughout the world, was indispensable for some years to come. He listened to their urgings, and very reluctantly complied. He allowed his name to go forward. An intrigue largely personal but partly religious engineered a rebuff for him in the face of the whole world. A man whom he despised (and whom did he not despise?) was chosen in his place.

When I left Paris the following morning he came to the station to see me off. He did not attempt to

conceal his chagrin that Frenchmen should so soon forget his services. When I said to him, "The public soon forget ; it is the ultimate fate of all who serve it faithfully," he replied, "They will not do it quite like this in England."

Apropos of his defeat by M. Deschanel in the contest for the Presidency, there is a very good story told of a duel he had once fought with his successful rival. It is related *Duel with Deschanel* that the fight took place in a garden somewhere in the suburbs of Paris. They fought with swords. M. Clemenceau was a very formidable swordsman, and as he pressed his opponent the latter retreated farther and farther from the threatening weapon. At last M. Clemenceau got tired of this continuous retreat, and, putting his sword under his arm he waved his hand, and with a bow towards M. Deschanel, he said, "Monsieur is leaving us." Twenty-seven years later, in a different duel, it was M. Deschanel who drove the expert fencer off the ground.

M. Clemenceau was the greatest French statesman—if not the greatest Frenchman—of his day.

He was in every fibre of his being a Frenchman. He had no real interest in *Greatness as a statesman* humanity as a whole. His sole concern was for France. As long as France was humbled he cared not what other people were exalted. As long as France was victorious he did not worry in the least about the tribulations of any other country. To him France was all in all. When he began public life he found his beloved country humiliated to the dust. When he ended his career he left France the most powerful State on the Continent of Europe—largely through his exertions.

In criticism he was virulent and ferocious. He was by nature a killer. But in action he was calm, restrained and practical. He was always ready to concede or to compromise in order to get a move on. My first experience of this quality was over the Versailles Council. When he came into office his first impulse was to sweep away all the decisions arrived at by his predecessors. Amongst them was the effort to organise an Inter-Allied General Staff at Versailles to co-ordinate the war effort of the Allies on sea and land. His notion was to run the War from his office in Paris. He soon discovered that Britain, Italy and America were not disposed to take orders from the French War Office. Like

*Failure to
understand
sea-power*

all Frenchmen in the War—Generals and Ministers—he concentrated his mind exclusively on the land campaign and was inclined to say with the rest of his distinguished compatriots, “there shall be no more sea.” He gradually realised the decisive importance of command of the sea. Here he saw that the British Fleet and British shipping were predominant, and that he was quite incompetent to undertake the direction of operations on the waves. Even on land, the contribution of the Allies in the aggregate outnumbered that of the French. When he came into power he had not made a real study of the war problems as a whole. His eyes were on Noyon where the Germans were entrenched not so many leagues from Paris. But he was not above learning his job. Like all great men, he was not too proud to perceive his mistakes or to alter his plans to conform with that perception. At first he was difficult and dictatorial, but he soon understood that this would not do, and after his first meeting at Versailles he realised that a

new organisation which surveyed and kept itself informed, and took cognisance of all the Allied activities in every quarter and element, would be helpful to him in the discharge of his onerous duties. It was the first time he had come into contact with certain aspects of the struggle—notably those that finally decided the issue of the War, the blockade by the Allies and the efforts made to thwart the desperate but dangerous counter-blockade initiated by the enemy. He realised for the first time how completely the Allies depended not only for their war resources but for their daily bread on our shipping, and how necessary it was to protect it and to repair its losses. It was here also that he was given the information which demonstrated how those flank attacks made elsewhere than in France were threatening the cohesion of the Central Powers, and gradually disintegrating those forces which safeguarded the Eastern and Southern frontiers of Germany whilst they menaced the British Empire on its more vulnerable but important routes.

I have many a time been asked how I personally got on with Clemenceau. There is always an expectation that the answer will reveal a cat-and-dog life led by us during our two years of close co-operation. Much of this belief is due to silly or malicious gossip. Sometimes a playful and harmless arrow sent across the table either in conversation or discussion is picked up by one man, the next passes it on with a barb attached, the third dips it in poison. Often it is the pure invention of the kind of person who likes to pass a new story or a phrase supposed to be characteristic of a prominent public man like Clemenceau when the old ones are getting rather

*Our friendly
relations*

stale. Sometimes, alas, these supposed unpleasantnesses were the creation of the spiteful fancy of men who disliked one or other or both of us. What is the real truth? I have never transacted more important business with any man than with Georges Clemenceau, and I have never met any man during the whole course of my public life with whom I more enjoyed doing business. The many opportunities I had of interchanging views with him are amongst the most delightful and treasured memories of my life. There is not an episode or a word that rankles. I came to the conclusion, at the very start of our official contact, that it was necessary to impress upon this strong-willed and overbearing old political warrior that any attempt to hector or to bully would not be tolerated, that he must treat all representations coming from the spokesmen of the British Empire with respect and that he must apply to them the best thought of his powerful mind. At an early date I chose a topic upon which there was some difference of opinion, but as to which I felt assured that we were entirely in the right. When he rather curtly and in his roughest manner tried to sweep me aside, I protested with an emphasis—perhaps a deliberate over-emphasis—which completely astonished him. He very adroitly gave in. After that his temper, which could be savage, never ruffled our intercourse.

*An opening
quarrel*

CHAPTER LXXIV

THE MILITARY POSITION

I. SIR DOUGLAS HAIG'S VIEWS

I HAVE already related in a previous volume how, on the occasion of one of my visits to H.Q. in France, I requested the Commander-in-Chief to submit his views on the military position which would result from the probable event of Russia being unable to maintain an active part in the War for another campaign. It was quite clear from the elaborate answers which he gave to my question, that he had only one idea in his mind, and that he had given no real consideration to any alternative plans or projects. He only considered the question of "the feasibility of overcoming the resistance of the German Armies by direct attack." That attack was to be prosecuted in the Passchendaele salient for a few more weeks, and the offensive was to be resumed in the same promising bog as soon as possible in the spring. When Gough's Army was defeated in the following spring, there was a controversy about man-power ; so it is instructive to take note of the conclusion to which Sir Douglas Haig had come in October as to the probable strength of the German Army in 1918. Even if Russia "failed us to the extent of making a separate peace" his view was that it would not make such a difference to the German strength as to justify the British Army

in postponing its offensive. The Germans, according to him, had already brought most of their best divisions from Russia to the West. Most of those that were left on the Russian, Danubian and Balkan Fronts were "of low fighting value, and only 32 divisions are estimated as fit to take part in severe fighting on the Western Front." The remaining 59 divisions would probably be fully employed in watching Russia and in maintaining German influence over the armies of our Allies as at present. He calculated that the addition of the 32 more efficient divisions would give Germany a total of 179 divisions on the Western Front. But when he comes to examine the composition of all these divisions he expresses a low opinion of their quality.

"Nineteen of the German divisions now on this front are of poor quality ; only fit for defensive on quiet Fronts ; 135 of the remainder have already suffered heavy defeats this year, and that number will be increased in the next few weeks. Of the 179 German divisions therefore, the value of *at least* 154 (135 + 19) must be written down considerably."

He takes a still more contemptuous view of the reserves upon which the Germans had to rely for filling up their depleted divisions. He estimates that the wastage which he had inflicted and was still inflicting on the enemy would leave at the end of the year but a small balance, *if any*, of the 500,000 men in the German reserves then available, and they were likely to commence the new year with only 500,000 to 600,000 reserves at their disposal, including the whole of the youths of 18, which, judging by his

experience of the preceding class, would be of low fighting value. Haig constantly reverts to this question of the growing inferiority of the German troops.

“The German losses are being replaced now in large proportions by quite inferior material, and the proportion of such material in the German ranks will increase rapidly in the future, while by May or June, the German reserves will be exhausted.”

When Haig comes to a review of the comparative equipment of the two forces he is still more hopeful and confident.

“In artillery, still more in munitions supply, and in aircraft, the Allies will have a marked superiority, and the power of increasing that *Allied superiority* superiority very greatly. In reserves of man-power the Allies, including America, have a still greater superiority.”

As to the French Army, he estimates that the 100 French Divisions might be reckoned as fully equal to a corresponding number of German divisions “under the conditions explained above.” Those conditions put a very low valuation on the quality of the German troops ; so this assessment of the fighting value of the French Army was, to say the least, not very flattering.

The War Cabinet have been criticised because in their distribution of our man-power between the various war services which made competitive claims upon our dwindling reserves, they did not estimate

the German strength at its real power ; if that criticism is justifiable there was no one who was more responsible for the miscalculation of the strength of

Haig's miscalculations the Army the Germans could muster on the French Front in 1918 than Sir Douglas Haig himself. His considered review of the comparison of the Germans and the Allies, not only in numbers but in quality and equipment, came at a time when the Cabinet were giving a good deal of consideration to the demands for additional men made by the Fleet, by our transport services on sea and land, and by the production of coal and food supplies.

When Haig discovered his mistake it was too late for any rearrangement. The Government had by then apportioned the national man-power. Not a single battalion could be added to the trained men available for the Western Front in the spring. We know now that even if we had been in a position to comply with every requisition which Sir Douglas Haig had made in his October paper, by withdrawing men from essential services in England, by starving the forces in other theatres, and by refusing to comply with the insistent requests of the French to take up more line, we could not have furnished him with such a superiority of numbers as would have enabled him to conduct a successful spring offensive in Flanders. He underestimated the German reserves that were available, the number of divisions that could be withdrawn from Russia, and the fighting quality of most of the German human material. He ludicrously overestimated the losses which he had succeeded in inflicting upon the German Army. Even with a great preponderance in numbers and guns he was unable to break through the German

lines during the long fighting at Passchendaele. His strategic conception for 1918 was therefore based on demonstrably false premises.

The final overthrow of Russia and Roumania had now completely changed the military prospect for some months to come. The best part of the immense Army which Germany and Austria had been compelled to maintain on their Eastern Front was now free to take part in operations on the West ; in France and in Italy. Until the American Army had been trained and equipped to appear on the scene of action in sufficient numbers to counterbalance the enemy reinforcement, the situation would, as far as numbers were concerned, be more or less that with which the Allies were confronted in the first year of the War before the British Army had rolled up in sufficient numbers to alter the comparative strength of the rival hosts. By mid-October, 1917, it was quite evident that the Russian Army could no longer be relied upon to do any more fighting. In these circumstances, Pétain was for maintaining a strictly defensive attitude until the Americans were ready. In his judgment they could not help in our offensives until 1919. Haig was for renewing the offensive in the spring of 1918 without waiting for them.

Thus Haig and Pétain could not agree on the appropriate strategy for the Allied forces on the Western Front, while the preparations were being made for the spring campaign of 1918. Repeated conferences took place ; but they could not fix on any plan—defensive or offensive. In the summer and autumn fighting of 1917 each had gone his own way according to his own strategical notions. There

*Effect of
Russian
collapse*

*Divergent
views of
Pétain
and Haig*

was no cohesion and not much concert in their plans. One hammered at the Germans and the other pecked. The hammer was buried in the sludge. The pecking succeeded in the little it was designed to achieve. On the whole this arrangement suited the Germans.

Here is the French official story of the divergencies of opinion between the two Commanders :—

“ Marshal Haig, deep in the battle of Flanders, was absorbed in his task of the hour ; at a time when neither public opinion, nor even his own army expected any further important result from the operations in progress, he continued to hope for events so decisive as to alter profoundly the same year the situation on the Western Front. In these circumstances, he was far from sharing the anxiety of the French Command over the attitude adopted by Russia. At all events he thought that the best method of remedying the collapse of this Ally was to assume a strenuous offensive on the Anglo-French Front as soon as possible.”*

*French
official
account*

This was emphatically not Pétain's view, nor was it Foch's opinion as to the most suitable strategy for the first part of the year.

On 18th October, 1917, an interview took place between Haig and Pétain at Amiens, at which the latter laid before the British Commander-in-Chief his ideas as to the military situation and the best method of dealing with it. He adhered to the opinion he had repeatedly expressed that we could not take the risk of a definite offensive in the early part of 1918 unless Russia remained in the War and the

* “ Les armées françaises dans la grande guerre,” VI.

Russian Army recovered her fighting efficiency. If that condition were not fulfilled, our efforts would have to be concentrated upon securing the best distribution for defence of the forces available on the Western Front, and on arranging that the reserves of both forces should be capable of being concentrated in support of whatever part of the front the Germans decided to attack.

But Haig still clung to his view that the offensive must be renewed by the British Army next year, and confirmed his attitude in a note he handed to Pétain at the time and in a long letter with which he followed up the interview two days later. In this letter he developed his plan and his arguments for sticking to it :—

*Haig's letter
to Pétain*

“ G.H.Q. of the British
Armies in the Field,
19th October, 1917.

My dear General,

Since our interview yesterday, I have given most careful consideration to the arguments you developed and I beg leave to state my views on the question.

The fact of drafting you relief over a front of six divisions would not only diminish the importance of the troops which it would be possible for me to muster for the offensive operations to be undertaken next spring, but, in addition, their fitness would be impaired on account of the reduction entailed in the rest and training indispensable.

As, in addition, I am called upon to lose the valuable aid of General Anthoine's Army, my forces for the offensive would be so considerably

diminished that, unless the resources at my disposal could be increased by reinforcements from other theatres of operations, an appreciable reduction in the scale of my Flanders offensive, if not its complete suspension, would result from my compliance with your request.

In my opinion, such grave consequences would result for the Allies' cause that I would call your attention to the following points :—

(a) As you are aware, due to my offensive operations this year, *the German expenditure of divisions has more than doubled our own total.** Six of my divisions on the defensive will only have to hold a similar number of German divisions, even less perhaps.

*Employed offensively, on the contrary, these same divisions can exhaust a much greater number of the enemy's divisions of infantry—judging by this year's results, the total might amount to twelve.** Consequently, from the point of view of the security of our defensive front, I am rendering it safer by increasing the strength of my offensive than by relieving a section of your defensive front.

*This holds good whether or not the Germans bring back a certain number of divisions from the Russian Front.**

(b) As to the importance of maintaining the morale of your troops by the aid of offensive operations, local raids at frequent intervals, in the same way as operations of limited range, seem to me to yield excellent results from this point of view. I myself have tested this.

(c) From what you told me yesterday, you are not contemplating a large-scale offensive before

* The italics are mine.

the month of August, and until that date you will only carry out operations of limited scope with, consequently, only local repercussions. These operations would play a useful part in the offensive I am intending to continue in Flanders, but alone they cannot achieve any decision.

The question to which I draw your particular attention is that of knowing whether the Allies are in a position to run the risk of waiting for the month of August to try and obtain a decision. Your attention, moreover, will most certainly have been directed to the problem as to whether your reserves of available troops in the rear of your armies will be adequate for a decisive effort at this moment.

I assure you that I understand and share your difficulties. I am extremely anxious to come to your assistance. Like you, I think that it is desirable for us both to reach agreement on a plan of action which we can propose to our respective Governments.

But it is incumbent upon both of us to see that the plan upon which we are agreed affords every guarantee of our being enabled to reckon on the best results. I regret I cannot share your opinion that the best use to be made of the British troops would be to extend them over defensive fronts at the expense of the offensive to which they have proved they are equal, and from the success of which such great results can in all likelihood be expected in the future.

Given the forces which will probably be at my disposal next year (from information in my possession at the moment) all that I can hope to do, with regard to the relief of your troops, would be to

utilise my four divisions now on the coast, at the moment when you will take this sector, to prolong my front southwards. This relief might begin, for instance, during the last week in November.

And that, in my opinion, is not even the best strategical use which can be made of these divisions, and I believe it would be a sounder military conception if you were to relieve them again in the spring.

I consider that a prolongation of my front, carried out to the extent indicated above, would be possible next spring without compelling me to renounce my offensive in Flanders, although such an extension would still have a harmful effect. However, in order to come to your assistance and to facilitate agreement between us, I agree to this concession.

I trust that you will see fit to consent to this solution. I am simultaneously communicating with General Robertson to learn whether next spring I can hope to receive divisions issuing from other theatres of operations.*

Yours very sincerely,

D. HAIG,

Marshal."

Once more to quote the French official narrative of the events of the autumn :—

" Marshal Haig laid ~~down~~^{it} as a fundamental principle that, even if Russia made peace, the best decision would still be to pass on to the offensive with all the coalition forces. The principal attack,

* Attempts were made to fill up three British divisions in Egypt with native troops in order to release the white troops for France.

the important effort of the Entente, would take place in Flanders; the English Army would assume responsibility, merely asking the Allies for their help, either directly by participating in the battle, or in carrying out operations on other parts of the front. Imbued with these ideas, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army obviously could not look with favour on the obligation to relieve a section of the French troops; however, he promised, though with manifest regret, to devote four divisions to extending his front towards the Oise, beginning from the end of November.

General Pétain sought in vain to convince Marshal Haig in the days after the Amiens Conference that existing circumstances necessitated drawing up, above all, a defensive plan; his efforts met with no success.”*

The winter was near and the time was approaching when it was indispensable that the Allies, especially on the French and Flemish Front, should come to a definite agreement as to their joint plan of campaign under entirely new conditions—the withdrawal of Russia and the growing contribution of America. The absence of the Russians would only have its full effect in the spring; the presence of the Americans could not substantially influence the military situation before the summer of 1918. By the beginning of November, 1917, Russia was practically out of the War, and the Germans acted on that assumption and concentrated their reserves on the Western Front. On the other hand, an important event had occurred which reinvigorated the indomitable spirit

* Ibid.

of France drooping from its wounds, and weary with the strain of many disappointments.

Clemenceau had become President of the Council.

*Clemenceau
becomes
Premier*

I have related in the previous chapter how he came to be appointed. His rise to power was of critical importance for the further conduct of the War.*

• Chapter LXXIII : " Clemenceau."

CHAPTER LXXIV (*continued*)

THE MILITARY POSITION

2. PLANNING THE 1918 CAMPAIGN

TOWARDS the end of November, 1917, I went over to Paris to attend a series of Allied Conferences, called *Paris Conference of 29th Nov.-2nd Dec., 1917* to review the whole situation. I was accompanied by Mr. Balfour and Sir William Robertson. Italy was represented by the Prime Minister, Signor Orlando, and the Foreign Minister, Baron Sonnino. America was represented by Colonel House, General Bliss and General Pershing. M. Venizelos had come over from Greece. There was a large attendance of generals and state officials from the Allied countries at the opening meeting on the 29th November, and the big room at the Quai d'Orsay was more of a General Assembly than a Council of War. M. Clemenceau presided. It was his first appearance at any War Conference and it was evident from the start that he had made up his mind to use different methods from those of his predecessors and also to let us know his intention. He disdained to follow the stately rhetoric of Ribot or the resonant oratory of Briand. He uttered two or three short snappy sentences, delivered rapidly in a high-pitched voice with an imperative accent, calling upon those present to get to work at once.

So large and promiscuous a gathering could evidently not transact business. It therefore appointed

a number of Committees to consider different questions that called for detailed attention. A good deal of time was taken up with discussion of the position in Russia : that I relate in another chapter. But the real examination of the military problems confronting the Allies was reserved for a meeting of the Supreme War Council held at the Trianon Palace Hotel, Versailles, on the 1st December, over which M. Clemenceau presided. He was supported by General Foch and General Weygand. I was accompanied by Lord Milner, Sir William Robertson, and Sir Henry Wilson. General Cadorna was the military adviser of the Italian delegation and General Bliss was associated with Colonel House.

Knowing how important this meeting would be, and how it must give a direction to the whole course of military policy, I saw M. Clemenceau at the War Office in Paris, and spent much time in conferring with him as to the lead he should give as President in his opening address. I felt that his presidential address at the first meeting at Versailles of the Supreme War Council must strike the keynote of our policy. It was a source of great satisfaction to me to find that the relentless critic of past War Ministries in France and I were in accord on general principles and agreed as to our policy for the prosecution of the War on sea as well as on land, in the East as well as in the West. What he said about the best use to which we could put our resources of man-power should be noted. British writers who praise all that Clemenceau did whilst condemning all my ideas and endeavours will be disconcerted to find that in his first official deliverance as the War Leader of France the policy he advocated was the same as that I had been

*Clemenceau's
opening
address*

consistently urging upon the Allies. I need hardly say that he was not one of those affable and pliable folk who can be persuaded into any declaration against his will because he prefers harmony to argument. Throughout the whole of his contentious career he never went out of his way either to seek concord or to shun disagreement.

In opening the proceedings he said that "the substance of his address had been agreed upon in consultation between himself and Mr. Lloyd George." The full text of this declaration of policy, which covers the whole ground of the War, is given in Appendix II to this Chapter. It is worth perusing as a broad and comprehensive statement of the view then taken by the Allied leaders as to the course of the War and the action which ought to be taken to bring it to a victorious conclusion.

It had always been suggested that M. Clemenceau had been resolutely opposed to diverting any forces from the Western Front to any other flank of the enemy line. The discussions which *Support for* "side-shows" occurred on this occasion both at Versailles and at the Paris Conferences show how thoroughly misinformed were those who claimed the new French Prime Minister as an opponent of the so-called "side-shows." M. Clemenceau in his opening speech declared that the question of the situation in Italy should be the first and the most serious consideration :—

"Of the questions to be considered, one was whether our attitude in Italy was to be purely defensive, or were we to assume the offensive. He did not consider the question of conducting an

offensive should be simply left to the enemy. He proposed to circulate to the members of the Supreme War Council and the Military Advisers a Memorandum on the subject prepared by General Micheler, who had made a special study of it and who was convinced that an offensive could be effectively carried out with 28 divisions."

I have already regretted that M. Clemenceau had not been at the head of affairs during 1917. As I pointed out in the course of this discussion, I had made a similar proposal at the Rome Conference in January, 1917. I failed then even to interest the Italian Commander, and the Italian Ministers were equally indifferent to the project. As I related in previous volumes, the proposal was revived after the failure of the Nivelle offensive by Pétain, and subsequently by Foch. Haig had, however, already committed himself to an attack in Flanders. The idea of a great offensive in Italy was consequently put off until either he had succeeded or had assured himself that no real progress was possible in that direction. When the Passchendaele offensive stuck in August, the matter was again raised at a conference in Paris. The Italian military representative declared that it was then too late to attempt anything because of the weather. Ten weeks later the Germans launched their Caporetto offensive with calamitous results.

The way Signor Orlando received M. Clemenceau's proposal on this occasion was, to say the least, lukewarm and discouraging. The chiefs of the Italian Army and the heads of the Italian Government during the War not only never pressed for an Inter-Allied offensive on their front, but gave a chilling and a

*Italians
unwilling
for offensive*

killing reception to every suggestion made by either British or French statesmen or by French generals that a joint attack should be made in Italy on the Austrian Armies by a force strengthened by British and French contingents and with the help of the heavy artillery with which Britain and France alone could equip such an offensive. This is not easy to understand. Perhaps they remembered the last occasion on which French troops had come to their assistance in 1859 and the price—Nice and Savoy—they had ultimately had to pay. In any event the failure to anticipate the disastrous Italian defeat at Caporetto by a combined Allied offensive against the Austrians must be put down to this strange refusal of the Italian General Staff. It was the second time they had shrunk from seizing the helping hand so opportunely tendered to them by their Allies.

The reason for this reluctance must be left to conjecture. The idea of an Italian offensive, even if it emanated from amateur strategists, had the support of some of the ablest soldiers on the whole battlefield. Foch, Pétain and Micheler were amongst them.

Clemenceau's proposal was referred to the Permanent Military Advisers. They were directed to study the immediate situation on the Italian Front from the standpoint not only of the defensive but of the offensive also, and to report within the next fortnight on the military possibilities of the Italian Front.

Amongst other questions to be considered was that of transport of troops and material to Italy in case of such a campaign. Personally, I felt that the proposal came too late. These measures if adopted in the previous year would have changed the whole course of events. There would have been

no Chemin des Dames or Passchendaele horrors to record or repair. Neither would there have been a Caporetto nor a Russian and Roumanian collapse. The Germans would have been forced to strain their resources to the utmost to keep the half-starved and half-mutinous Austrian Armies from falling to pieces. It might be urged that in Austrian defiles we should have had to meet the same Germans as we encountered in Flemish slime. But here the Italian Army with its overwhelming superiority in numbers would have been enabled by our superior equipment to pull its full weight. On the other hand the armies of the Central Powers, weakened by the half-hearted and discontented troops of the Slavonic Provinces of Austria, would have presented more vulnerable fronts to the persistent attacks of the Allied infantry, artillery and tanks than the homogeneous German Armies that repelled these fierce and ceaseless onslaughts in France and Flanders. One of the reasons why the Germans were not anxious to seek the help of Austrian divisions in France in 1918 was that they did not think them reliable. Although I favoured the plan strongly in 1917 I felt that now in 1918, when both Russia and Roumania were for every practical purpose out of the way and the Germans were preparing to hurl the troops released from the Eastern Front against the Allied Armies in France, it was too late to divert our forces to Italy.

Clemenceau again demonstrated his breadth of view by his attitude towards the Salonika expedition.

*Salonika
forces to be
strengthened*

He not only stated categorically that it could not be abandoned, he actively supported proposals for strengthening our forces on that front. The Salonika expedition was detested by the Army authorities both

in France and in Britain ; this hatred was displayed in a revelation which took the political leaders at the Conference completely by surprise. M. Venizelos came to Paris to place before the Conference the food position in Greece. It was extremely serious and he appealed that supplies should be instantly sent to that country in order to avert starvation. He stated that the food shortage was interfering with recruitment for the divisions of the Army which he was endeavouring to raise for the Salonika Front. He reminded us of the fact that in July he had communicated to the military authorities of the West a project for raising 12 divisions of Greek troops for Salonika, if the necessary finance were provided as well as the requisite equipment. It was a plan which would constitute a real relief to the strained manpower of France and Britain. The Allied Military Chiefs, by failing to supply the equipment required for these divisions, neglected a remarkable opportunity. They might in this fashion have increased the pressure on the southern flank of the Central Powers without diverting a single man from the reinforcement of the armies in France and Flanders. The Greek troops, when thrown into the battle line later on, had fought with great courage and skill and made even greater progress in their attack than the British and French contingents. It was the kind of country that suited them, and the climate, to which they were accustomed, did not have such injurious effects upon their physique as it unfortunately had upon men drawn from the more temperate climate of the North. The addition of such a powerful contingent would have enabled the French and ourselves either to withdraw divisions from Salonika long before the March offensive, or to make such an attack upon the tired

and disillusioned Bulgarians as would have compelled the Germans and Austrians to come to their rescue. Many of the enemy divisions which found their way to France would have thus been diverted to the Balkans. The average military mind is fearfully and wonderfully made, and where its prejudices are engaged it is not always responsible for its actions.

The conferences concluded with a general direction to the military experts of the Supreme War Council.

Situation referred to military experts They were directed to survey the whole position in view of the new conditions which had arisen through the collapse of Russia, and to prepare plans for submission to the Governments and to the Staffs of the Allied Armies for their consideration. It was decided to hold another meeting of the Supreme Council as soon as these proposals were made.

In order to assist the military representatives on the Council to formulate their plans, the Council passed a series of resolutions as to the furnishing of full and up-to-date information to the Council by the military authorities and by the other departments of the respective Governments.

CHAPTER LXXIV (*continued*)

THE MILITARY POSITION

3. THE ALLIED STRATEGY FOR 1918

MEANWHILE, the question of the extension of the British Front was becoming acute.

The two Commanders-in-Chief were in contact during the month of December on the question of the plans for 1918. But the defection of the Russian Army and the steady and alarming stream of fresh German divisions towards the West does not seem to have made any impression on the stubborn and sticky mind of the British Commander. He would still attack them at Passchendaele, and attack alone without French help, and the greater their numbers the more complete their destruction. According to the French Official History :—

*Continued
disagreement
of Pétain
and Haig*

“ during December the Commanders-in-Chief of the British and French Armies did not succeed in reaching that close and comprehensive agreement which, however, was more than ever indispensable. . . . Thus, from the outset of the initial efforts at deciding on the plan of campaign for 1918, the two Commanders-in-Chief were obliged to state that their points of view were at variance ; they had been able to reach a relative agreement on a question of secondary importance—the draft of relief ; they remained, on the contrary,

as throughout the summer, in disagreement on the essential ideas which each judged indispensable as fundamental to the conduct of our forthcoming operations. From that time on, amid the perils threatening the immediate future of the Allied Powers, and even before the issue of the gravest difficulties which were to surge up inevitably at the moment of the enemy attack, the drawbacks of the dispersion of the command in the coalition were once more revealed."

On the 17th December, Haig visited Pétain at the French Headquarters and discussed the relief of the French line, but—to quote again the French Official History :—

" the most essential [question] remained unsolved. At this juncture every day added to the danger of procrastination ; the Allies should have hurried for fear of being surprised before being able to reach agreement."

In conformity with the resolutions adopted by the Supreme War Council at its meeting on 1st December, 1917, and with a view to assisting the deliberations of its Permanent Military Advisers at Versailles, General Foch prepared a memorandum setting out the plan of campaign for 1918 which he recommended. As it contains in essence the strategical plan which he pursued with such success after he was made Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces in 1918, it will be interesting to set it out in full at this stage of the narrative. Had he been placed in full command of the Allied Reserves before the 21st March,

*Foch's
memorandum :
plans for 1918*

the disasters of March and April would have been avoided and his plans for a counter-offensive would have fructified sooner than they did.

“ From the beginning of 1918 we must expect a heavy German offensive. . . .

We shall counter it by defensive preparations, now in process of execution on both the English and French Fronts ; these give grounds for optimism that the enemy offensive will be checked without having registered any decisive successes.

We shall also confront it by an attitude which, far from being passive, will involve, on the contrary, for the Entente Armies, the necessity of seizing every opportunity of imposing their will on the enemy and of resuming the offensive as soon as possible, which is the sole method of leading to victory.

With this aim in view, the Allied Armies must :—

(a) *In the event of an enemy attack*, not merely arrest and counter-attack the enemy on the very ground of their attacks, but also undertake heavy counter-offensives as a diversion on ground selected and prepared beforehand for as rapid an operation as possible ;

(b) *If the enemy does not attack*, be prepared to take the initiative in operations with a limited objective, with the object of overcoming the enemy, wearing him down, and preserving the fighting spirit of the troops ;

(c) *In both cases*, be capable of amplifying this action in the form of a *concerted offensive with decisive aims* if the wearing-down of the enemy or any other favourable circumstance in the

situation as a whole brings such a result within reach.

These are the necessary motives underlying the action of all the Allied Armies on their several fronts.

But, in addition, in certain quarters of the front which are particularly advantageous for the enemy, their attack may assume important proportions, extend over a long period by making fresh strides from time to time, may seek to wear down the material or moral forces of an Ally, may reopen another Battle of Verdun, a fierce long-drawn-out effort, destined to smash the nerves of a nation.

If the enemy is bent on this action, the danger of which is beyond discussion in the fourth year of war, there is only one method of compelling them to let go, of terminating this venture to undermine morale: this is for us to attack on another point of their front.

It is accordingly in action of a parallel nature, i.e., by a *counter-offensive to create a diversion* on the part of the Allied Armies, that it should be sought to *check the wearing-down offensive* engaged in by the enemy.

Yet, to be launched in time, it is imperative for such a type of counter-offensive for *diverting* purposes to have been *prepared some months ahead*.

For such a battle to offer adequate scope and significance, without remaining merely the conflict of a single Allied Army, a battle exclusively French—to free Verdun, for instance, which would not

suffice—for it to occupy, in this carefully prepared action, the whole of the available Allied troops and for it to ensure concentrated, simultaneous efforts making them strive together to attain a common, goal it is essential : that it should have been *devised* at the Inter-Allied Supreme War Council, the sole body competent to ensure common action, subsequently *prepared* in both British and French Armies.

This counter-offensive seeking to create a diversion, and prepared to reply to a persistent offensive on the part of the enemy would, at the same time, correspond to paragraph (c).

I beg you, therefore, to request the Supreme War Council :—

1. To have a plan of action, corresponding to the views I have set forth, drawn up by both British and French Generals, Commanders-in-Chief.

2. To draw up, in agreement with these same general officers, the scheme for a concerted offensive which will have to be decided with their consent, each being responsible for his relevant preparation, subject, however, to the reserve that the preparation indispensable for this counter-offensive is only to be undertaken after the fronts assigned to the several armies have been allotted in proportion to their respective troops."

This Memorandum was forwarded to the two Commanders-in-Chief as well as to the Supreme Council.

The advice given in it was by no means accepted by General Pétain, the French Commander-in-Chief.

After studying the Foch Memorandum for a week, Pétain sent to the military advisers his comments upon it, which were as follows :—

*Pétain's
comments*

“ The letter dated 1st January, 1918, addressed to the Supreme War Council, considers as eminently desirable that the offensive should be taken by the Entente Armies :—

1. Either, should the enemy attack, in the form of heavy counter-offensives for the purpose of diversion ; or

2. If the enemy fails to attack, in the form of operations having limited objectives, with intent to dominate and wear out the enemy ;

3. In both cases these actions ought to lead to a concerted offensive aiming at a decision.

The principle is beyond dispute.

Yet, however anxious we may be to recover the initiative for operations, we must bow to facts and draw up our forecasts, not on the basis of hypothetical data but on reality. *The American contribution is unlikely to carry weight in the battle before 1919, and until that date the Franco-British troops must be handled with such prudence as to leave the slightest possible rôle to be played by chance. . . .*”

He enters into an elaborate survey of alternatives and contingencies in order to demonstrate his theme. One of his assumptions is that the Austrians, relieved of the Russian pressure, will throw 25 of their divisions

on to the French Front.* He ends his Memorandum on a note of pessimism as to the opportunities of 1918 :—

“ These prospects and the precarious situation of our troops compel great prudence on our part in the use of our resources, if we want to hold out in 1918, without being excessively and incurably worn down, until the juncture when our American Allies are in a position to afford us substantial aid in the battle.

*No hope
of success
in 1918*

Undoubtedly, the nature of the German offensive may probably differ from that contemplated in the present letter. It is possible that for various reasons the enemy may attack on more confined fronts which will cost us less initially. With this assumption, several counter-offensives of retaliation or diversion are anticipated and the work of preparing the ground has been begun some time ago. But it is very important to bear in mind that these counter-offensives cannot be powerful, their performance is bound to be local and temporary for we must look to the outcome of the operations.

Finally, if our front is attacked over an area exceeding 50 km., we shall lack even the bare minimum for resisting the attack and it will be absolutely imperative for the English to come to our aid.

In sum, the 1918 battle will be defensive from the Franco-British side, not by the express desire

* The Austrians never sent more than five divisions to the French Front. The Germans had lost faith in Austrian troops.

of the Command but by the exigency of the situation. Lack of resources also imposes it upon us. It is better to realise it at once and to organise in consequence. . . .”

As will be seen later on, Marshal Haig was now disposed to take General Pétain's view as to the impracticability of any offensive on a great scale in 1918. Up till now he had been confident that a British offensive alone might force a victorious decision. He now felt doubt as to whether even a combined Allied attack was advisable or possible.

*Military
disagreement
on plans* The Foch document and Pétain's reply revealed the fact that there were serious differences not only between the Commanders-in-Chief of the two armies but between the two principal French Generals. The conflict here disclosed between the views of Pétain and Foch is fundamental. Foch insists on a single plan of action for the two armies, a simultaneous effort, and a counter-offensive in which both armies co-operate. Pétain's idea was that, if he was attacked, the English must come to his aid. Pétain also demanded that nothing should be left to chance ; yet he was in fact doing so. For he could not reckon how the English, or when the English, or in what strength the English would come to his aid. He could not be sure, and was therefore leaving everything to chance—the chance that the British Commander whose primary responsibility was the safety of his own Army would, when the battle commenced, take exactly the same view as to the direction and development of the German attack as he, with his anxieties for his own Army, would take. In the event it was Haig who found himself in this situation, “ a single

Allied army in conflict" (to use Foch's prophetic words) not knowing how the French, or when the French, or in what strength the French would come to his aid. Furthermore, mutual aid was too vague a system. A battle is a terrible drama moving with the swiftness and confusion of a whirlpool to a climax and a decision : it leaves no time to improvise methods of help. In this deeply erroneous strategic conception lies the origin of the impending disaster. Pétain must be blamed for originating it, Haig for adopting it.

These differences rendered the task of the Versailles Military Representatives one of exceptional difficulty and delicacy. All the rival plans were reviewed and discussed by them at Versailles when preparing their recommendations for the Supreme War Council. Their Report represented a compromise between the conflicting views, to such an extent that General Weygand on 22nd January, in a note to the Versailles Military Representatives, says :—

"To-day, under the menace and on the eve perhaps of the sternest effort which the enemy has yet attempted against us, no general plan for the 1918 coalition operations is in existence. . . ."

So perturbed was General Foch at the absence of any plan of campaign for 1918, that he felt it essential, in agreement with General Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, to call a conference of the three Commanders-in-Chief, Pétain, Haig and Pershing, in order to evolve an agreed scheme of operations to deal with a situation which was charged with danger. Foch contemplated that they should discuss

*Conference at
Compiègne*

all the very important problems which would shortly be submitted to the Supreme War Council: the adoption of a General Inter-Allied Reserve, the expediency of recalling troops from Italy and the transport of American troops to France. The Conference met on 24th January at Compiègne, the French Headquarters.

General Pétain opened the discussion with a re-statement of the opinions he was known to hold. The French Commander-in-Chief—

“ . . . did not conceal the fact that he believed it hardly possible for the situation of our effectives to permit us to take the offensive in 1918 ; in his judgment, the means of attack indispensable for its execution would be lacking as long as the co-operation of the American Army had not made itself significantly felt.”*

Marshal Haig then expounded his views :—

“ . . . It was more than ever essential to reinforce our defensive organisations, train our reserves, prepare the process of transporting them, endeavour to be acquainted in good time with the enemy plans. Was it possible that we, in our turn, would be able to resume in 1918 the initiative for operations? *Marshal Haig refrained from expressing any very definite opinion on this point ; he contented himself with pointing out that our successful resistance might leave us so weakened as to compel us to await the expansion of the American Army before we should find ourselves in a position to obtain the decision. . . . He upheld the point of*

* “ Les armées françaises dans la grande guerre,” VI.

view he had formulated on 19th January: he declared his agreement with General Pétain on the need for observing a defensive attitude, as on the use of the troops and the action of the reserves; like the French Army, the English Army held in readiness three fields of action for the offensive with the power to engage five divisions on each."

This last offensive contemplated a number of small offensives with limited aims.

The case developed by General Foch during the sitting was to a considerable extent at variance with the views of the two Commanders-in-Chief. The French Chief of General Staff in fact vigorously upheld the ideas which he had established as fundamental to the draft plan of campaign addressed in January to our Permanent Military Representative: he accordingly insisted on the necessity for executing a strenuous counter-offensive in order to check the German offensive; he said:—

*Foch
disagrees
with Haig
and Pétain*

"... Our need is not for two separate plans, but a general plan, anticipating and preparing for the offensive action at the appropriate juncture and upon a joint scene of action of all the available Allied forces.

... In our plans, nothing is provided for the final battle, utilising all the remaining available French, British and American Allied forces."

He accordingly demanded "not that more offensive battlefields be organised but that preparation be made for the utilisation of the Allied troops which at a given moment will remain available. . . ."

The two Commanders-in-Chief replied to General Foch's arguments by again describing the poverty

of their effectiveness. It was not the hope of the Anglo-French Command to take a ~~general~~ offensive during the forthcoming battle.

There again are two schools of thought. As Encl said, what was required was one plan for the two armies, not each army with its own plan. Haig and Pétain kept up their lamentations about the poverty of their effectives. All is relative. The effectives of each army standing alone might seem poor next to the German. The united effectives of the two Allied Armies were still richer, and at the climax of the German strength were equal in numbers and more powerful in machinery than the German. But Pétain and Haig were determined to fight the Germans with separate armies, operating separately, as the Allies had so obligingly done for three years. Motives can only be conjectured : but probably the objection of each to a single plan lay in this—it would have diminished his authority over his army. Hence their obstinacy, which only a catastrophe broke down.

Pershing's chief contribution to the discussion was his insistence on the proposition that :—

“ . . . on the day when an offensive action is required of the American troops, the American Army will have to be autonomous.”

At the Conference of Compiègne the high military authorities had again failed to reach an agreement on the important questions of the Allied campaign for 1918. True, the two Commanders-in-Chief professed that they were now agreed on their plan of campaign. They claimed that they had even begun to prepare to execute it ; the emergence of the Supreme

Council's plan of an Inter-Allied Reserve under independent administration formed Foch and Haig as to a common front—not against the Germans, but in opposition to the Versailles. In effect, however, their views were at variance not only with the proposals made by General Foch with regard to the Western Front, and with the suggestions submitted by the Permanent Military Representatives to the Allied Governments, but also in some important respects with each other. It was still more significant that the Conference had not broached the question, capital as it was, of the single command, even in such an attenuated form as the constitution of a General Inter-Allied Reserve.

In the days following the Conference of Compiègne Marshal Haig and General Pétain did not conceal the repugnance they felt for the scheme for an Inter-Allied Reserve forwarded to them for consideration. On 27th January, General Pétain declared to General Foch that he regarded the reserves now stationed behind the Franco-British Front as barely adequate "to safeguard the liberty of manœuvre of the Franco-British High Command in the initial stages of the defensive battle." In his opinion, the General Reserve could only be levied from the Allied forces in Italy; in such case, it seemed advisable that it should include four Italian divisions retained on the plain of the Po and four French and English divisions respectively which would be recalled from Italy to France.

The result of the Compiègne Conference was eminently unsatisfactory in that it revealed a fundamental difference of opinion between Generals who had within a few weeks to face the most formidable

attack launched on their front since the first German attack in 1914. General Weygand's solution was the appointment of a Generalissimo of the Allied forces. Complete unity of command under one general would no doubt have been the simplest, most direct, and much the most effective method of establishing strategic unity. It was obviously the appropriate remedy for the weaknesses of a divided command from which the Allies had suffered such damage. Why then was not the proposal of the French Military Representatives agreed to by the other Military Representatives? Neither Henry Wilson nor General Cadorna accepted the suggestion. Not only was it not adopted—it had not the slightest chance of being adopted at that moment. There were national prejudices, political susceptibilities and personal jealousies to overcome. One can understand the dislike which one great nation would have of placing its finest army under the command of another—and not a greater—nation. It was easier for the French to advance and support the idea than for British Generals or Ministers. But even they had political susceptibilities which hindered that desirable solution of Allied difficulties. Foch was never an acceptable military chieftain for the ardent Republicans who have governed France for at least a generation. And the personal rivalries which intervened were just as intense on the French side as on ours. Haig was convinced that he was a better practical soldier than Foch, and Pétain thought himself a safer general with an equal, if not superior, record of success. A worse element was the rivalry of the various staffs. If Foch were made Generalissimo, the whole status of the two G.H.Q.'s was lowered to second place.

It is sad to think that these little human frailties should influence men in great issues. But no profession is free from them and experience makes me think that members of the military profession are no more immune from propensities that disturb the balance of judgment than those who are engaged in other honourable avocations. Clemenceau at that date would not have placed Foch above Pétain for reasons I give elsewhere. Neither Orlando nor I could at that time have agreed to making Foch Generalissimo without encountering formidable opposition in the Senate and the Services, and without facing a risk of repudiation at home which would have had a chilling effect on our relations with the French Army and the French people. The next best thing was to unify the general reserves and place them under a single direction. This was a subtle solution of the difficulty. We avoided the drawbacks and obtained the advantages of a Generalissimo. Each Commander-in-Chief would retain his full authority unimpaired : thus the objection to a Generalissimo was avoided. When an offensive on a great scale is anticipated the preparations made by the enemy behind their lines give a general indication of the quarter where the blow is likely to fall. But it is not possible to define its limits or the point where the enemy is likely to concentrate his greatest strength. The result is that it is not easy to determine the exact spot where the reserves should be placed in order to reach the battlefield in the shortest time. That is why in every attack, whether made by the Allies or by the Germans, the assaults have generally had overwhelming numbers for the first day or two. At Neuve Chapelle the British had a superiority of ten to one. On the first day of the Somme we had six to one. When the Vimy Ridge was carried, we had

at least three to one. In the battle of the 21st March the Germans had three to one on the Fifth Army Front and two to one against the Third Army. That is why the first assault generally succeeds. The best a defending General can do is to arrange his reserves behind the threatened area in such a way as to be available to be thrown in at the weakest point with the least possible delay. That was the reason that compelled Foch and the Versailles representatives to recommend the formation of a large General Reserve which could be placed in the vicinity of the threatened sector as soon as it became clear where the Germans were massing their forces. Upon this eminently practical and sensible project the Versailles Staff concentrated, and they embodied it in the recommendations they submitted to the Council in two remarkable memoranda known as Notes 12 and 14. (As Joint Note No. 12 contains a comprehensive but compendious review of the whole position, and formed the basis of discussions which had momentous results, I have thought it desirable that this document should be given textually in Appendix I to this chapter.)

The proposals contained in these two Notes were governed by the consideration
Plans recommended by Versailles military chiefs that :—

“ The Allies were confronted with a fundamental, if not permanent change in the conditions upon which their strategy had to be based, as compared with the conditions, existing or anticipated, as long as the Russian Armies kept the field.”

They contemplated a heavy attack by the Germans on the Allied positions in France in the early spring,

an attack which might possibly, in their opinion, attain a strength of 96 Divisions, exclusive of *roulement*. They considered that the first and foremost task of the Allies was to organise their resources to resist this impending German attack. In order to make the position secure in France it was necessary that the Allied forces should be continuously maintained at the strength which they possessed at that date, and that they should also receive "the expected reinforcement of not less than two American divisions a month." That meant that France and Britain should make an effort to maintain during the struggle their numbers at the figure they amounted to at that moment. They also regarded it as a necessary condition of security that there should be a substantial progressive increase in the mechanical strength of the Allied Armies ; in guns, in machine-guns, in aeroplanes, and in tanks. They attached importance to strengthening and co-ordinating the Allies' system of defences, "*more particularly in the sectors most liable to heavy attack.*" Their last and most important recommendation is one which they developed in a separate paper :—

“ That the whole Allied forces in France should be treated as a single strategic field of action, and that the disposition of the reserves, the periodic rearrangement of the point of junction between the various Allied forces, and the actual front, and all other arrangements, should be dominated by this consideration.”

Need for strategic unity

To those of us who had been labouring hard to secure strategic unity, this last recommendation

seemed to be far and away the most fruitful suggestion in the whole document. That the Allies failed for three years to break through the German line in spite of a 50 per cent. superiority, was largely if not mainly due to the fact that the Germans possessed the incalculable advantage of a United Command, and could, without negotiations between Commanders and Governments representing completely independent armies on the same front, distribute and redistribute the forces according to the exigencies of the situation. That was worth more to them than a mere numerical equality which a large contingent of Austrians on the same front would have given them.

It was for this reason that I attached more importance to the recommendation as to the General Reserve than to any other part of the Versailles Staff document. No possible withdrawal of troops from Russia could give the German Army even a temporary and evanescent numerical superiority on the Western Front in 1918 of more than 5 per cent. That slight advantage, if it were attained, would disappear in the late spring when the Americans had rolled up, and from the start it would be far more than countered by the unquestionable superiority of the Allies in guns, ammunitions, machine-guns, tanks, aeroplanes, and above all, in transport. When they came to consider whether there would be any opportunity in the course of 1918 of securing in the main Western theatres a final or even a far-reaching decision against the enemy, they accepted the prognosis of Pétain :—

“ . . . If the enemy cannot gain a final decision against the Allies the question arises whether there is any opportunity in the course of 1918 for

the Allies to secure, in the main Western theatres, a final, or even a far-reaching decision, against the

enemy? The Military Representatives
Victory in the West unlikely in 1918 are of the opinion that, *apart from such measure of success as is implied in the failure of the enemy's offensive, or may be*

attained by local counter-strokes, and leaving out of account such improbable and unforeseeable contingencies as the internal collapse of the Enemy Powers, or the revival of Russia as a serious military factor, no such decision is likely to be secured during the fighting period of 1918. Neither the addition of the American troops in view during this period, nor such reinforcements as could be secured for any one of the main theatres by withdrawing from the secondary theatres any margin of troops that may be available above the necessities of local defence, would make a sufficient difference in the relative position of the opposing forces to justify the hope of attaining such a decision."

In the following concluding sentences they seemed to veer to the Foch thesis of the possibility of a general offensive with a view to reaching a decision :—

" This should not prevent the Allied General Staffs closely watching the situation in case an unexpected favourable development should furnish an opportunity for vigorous offensive actions for which they should always be prepared. In any case the defensive on the Western Front should not be of merely a passive character, but be worked out definitely and scientifically, with the intention of gaining the maximum advantage from any opportunities offered in this theatre."

The consideration of the nature of the measures that should be envisaged for defence, as well as for taking advantage of any opportunity that might offer, was dealt with in another paper. This outlined a proposal of a General Reserve under a central authority to meet any emergency or take advantage of any opportunity that might arise. To form this Reserve the French, British and Italian Armies were each to make their contribution.

These measures excluded the possibility of achieving any far-reaching decision in the Balkans. Owing to "the strength and comparative homogeneity of the numerous forces against them," the experts thought it possible that in this theatre the Allied forces might find themselves heavily attacked and might be compelled to give ground. To provide against this eventuality, they suggested that adequate preparations should be made in time for the occupation of shorter and stronger lines, covering the mainland of Greece, and if possible, Salonika.

It is stated by the British Official History, that at the Compiègne Conference, Sir Douglas Haig proposed that the whole of the British and French troops should be withdrawn from Salonika and brought to France.

*Haig suggests
abandoning
Salonika*

He may have done so in the course of the interchange of ideas. It fits in with his obsession that all the men and all the guns and all the ships must be given to him for his front. The proposal, if adopted, would have laid open the whole of Greece, with its convenient ports for submarines, to the unresisted occupation of the Central Powers. Without a struggle they would have secured a number of submarine bases at the most vulnerable points of the pathway to Egypt and our Eastern Empire. The

Mediterranean would have been practically closed to our shipping. Constantine was an instrument ready to their hand to be used for any purpose for which he could have pleaded the slightest appearance of duress. He had already voluntarily handed over two Greek divisions to the Germans. Had we taken away all our troops from the Balkans, he would have placed the whole Greek Army at the disposal of the Powers with whom lay his real sympathies. The Bulgarian Army, released from the presence of a formidable enemy force south of the Balkans, could have spared a few divisions to help one or other of their Northern allies or to support the hard-driven Turkish Army to check the British advance in Palestine. This acknowledged and accepted defeat in the Balkans would have adversely changed the whole situation in the East without giving us a greater superiority of numbers in the West than the British Army possessed in its Flanders campaign. Haig's suggestion was so patently fatuous that it received no encouragement from any other soldier, British, French or Italian, and consequently never appeared at the Conference table. Neither Sir Douglas Haig nor Sir William Robertson ever hinted to the Cabinet that they harboured such a thought. I would never have heard of it had it not appeared in the Official History.

The Military Members at Versailles, after dealing with the Western Front and Salonika, urged strongly that an effort be made to :—

*Offensive
recommended
against
Turkey*

“... inflict such a crushing series of defeats upon the Turkish Armies as would lead to the final collapse of Turkey and her elimination from the War would not only have the

most far-reaching results upon the general military situation, but might also, if not too long deferred, be in time to enable the Allies to get into direct touch with, and give effective help to, such elements of resistance to German domination as may still exist in Roumania and Southern Russia."

In order to achieve this end they did not contemplate the withdrawal of any units or reinforcements from the West. They considered :—

" . . . that the existing Allied forces in Palestine and Mesopotamia are already sufficiently superior to the enemy in numbers, equipment and morale to justify the hope that successful operations can be carried out with these forces providing they are maintained at full strength. They would also strongly urge that any additional minor reinforcements such as could be provided by the *termination* of the East African operations, by the raising of new units in India or in the French possessions, by the transfer of superfluous mounted troops from the Western theatre, or possibly at a later date, by the transfer of one or two Divisions from Salonika, if the enemy make no serious offensive in the Balkans, and the organisation of the Greek Army makes sufficient progress to enable it to be relied upon to replace the Divisions sent away, should be concentrated in the Turkish theatre."

As to the Italian Front, the main recommendations were directed towards the reorganisation of the Italian Army. The proposal put forward by M. Clemenceau at the first meeting of the Supreme Council for a joint Allied offensive on a great scale on

the Italian Front was not encouraged. It was generally felt to be too late to consider such a project when the German clans were gathering from east and south for an immense onslaught on the Allies in France. Actually, Note 12 was signed by the Allied Military Representatives on the day that Ludendorff finally decided that his first great attack should be made on the British Front at the earliest moment at which it was possible to stage so gigantic an operation.

CHAPTER LXXIV (*continued*)

THE MILITARY POSITION

4. THE MEETING OF THE ALLIED SUPREME COUNCIL

THE meeting of the Supreme Council to consider the military situation and to examine the recommendations of the military advisers was held on the 30th January and lasted for four days. *War plans laid before Supreme Council* Its principal business was to come to a decision on the measures already proposed and thus to secure a united front for this critical year. The foremost of these measures was the scheme worked out for setting up an independent General Reserve. Rumours had reached me that both Commanders-in-Chief were angrily opposed to the proposal. They disliked the idea itself, they disliked even more the notion of having their strategic plans subordinated to the arbitrament of General Foch. When Milner and I reached Versailles and heard the gossip of the G.H.Q.'s we expected a rough passage for the General Reserve propositions.

The assembly at the Trianon Palace Hotel was a notable one not merely for the importance of its theme, but for the representative character of those who attended it and took part in its discussions. Clemenceau, in the chair, was surrounded by an array of important Ministers from all the Allied countries. The Commanders-in-Chief (Marshal Haig and General Pétain) and the Chiefs of the Staff of France and Britain, General Foch and Sir William

Robertson, were present. The Italian and Belgian Armies were also represented, as were the Allied Navies. The Military Representatives of the Supreme Council were present. America was represented by General Bliss. No one could challenge the authoritative character of the gathering. It was thoroughly representative not only of the Allied Governments, but of the military and naval services of the Allies.

Before we came to an examination of the proposal for setting up a General Reserve, there was a general discussion on the position in the West.

Discussion There is nothing that strikes one more in
on outlook perusing the notes taken of that discussion, and the memoranda furnished by the Allied General Staff, than the extent to which all our military advisers overestimated the strength of the enemy and thus understated the possibilities of the 1918 campaign. General Foch was the only exception to the general pessimism of the rest, probably because he took a general view and did not exclude from his mind everything but his own particular front. There were decisive factors of which either they were completely ignorant or which they chose to ignore. They were either not informed about, or did not appreciate the effect of the serious food and fuel shortage on the enemy side. It ultimately precipitated the collapse of the Central Powers by destroying the morale and mobility of their armies, by weakening the spirit and the will of the nations behind the army, and it also deprived both the Austrians and the Germans of the full benefit of the Russian Peace, for it compelled them to maintain large forces in Russia in order to exploit its food reserves. There was also an incomprehensible agreement amongst all the military chiefs that the American

contribution would have no appreciable effect upon the campaign of 1918. Sir Douglas Haig was doubtful whether they could allow in 1918 "for the addition of American units of a total strength equivalent to eight divisions." And he added :—

*Haig's
pessimism*

"As regards the American forces, our own experience had been that our new divisions required nine months' home training and six months' training in France, before they were fit for hard fighting, though they could be put into quiet sections of the line before that. Nor could we expect that the American divisions could be placed in the line together in any number without inviting a heavy German attack. He *consequently did not consider the Allies could expect the American force, as a force, to be of effective support this year.*"

He therefore stated that he had come to the conclusion that :—

"A large offensive such as had been indicated by General Foch, was not, in his opinion, practicable."

In fact, he took such a depressing view of the prospects that :—

"he considered that if the enemy attacked in force the situation would be very serious by the autumn."

This indeed was a come-down from the exalted altitudes in which he dwelt in October, 1917. He then thought that the German Army was so demoralised, that its fighting value was so deteriorated, and

that its reserves had been so completely destroyed, that if we furnished the British Army with reinforcements (which we did not fail to do, for we created mechanically powerful new units), his army alone could conduct a triumphant offensive against them so long as the French just held their line with an occasional disquieting push to prove that they were still alive and present. There is no way of explaining why this second and contrary idea should displace his first and previous idea, except by supposing that in neither case was there any clear or accurate thinking. There was no change in circumstances. For in his first plan he had fully reckoned on the withdrawal of the picked German divisions from the Russian Front and discounted its effect.

Sir William Robertson was of the same opinion as to the impracticability of a great offensive operation in 1918 and said that General Foch "had proposed an offensive on a bigger scale than he thought possible." General Pétain was of the same opinion, and said :—

"As regards the American Army, he agreed entirely with the conclusions arrived at by Sir Douglas Haig. In fact, in his opinion, the American Army, if it wished to retain its autonomy, would be of no use to the Allies in 1918, except perhaps along some quiet section of the front."

We all know how completely these pessimistic estimates of the American contribution were falsified by the event.

Then we arrived at our decision as to the General Reserve. Let this be noted carefully at this stage : for a few weeks later the fact is going to become

important. Sir William Robertson, Sir Douglas Haig and General Pétain were present during the whole of the proceedings and took part in the discussions, and accepted the resolutions which were ultimately agreed to. There was no dissentient voice from any quarter when the final proposals were put to the meeting. M. Clemenceau opened the proceedings by propounding four questions :—

*General
Reserve*

- “ ‘ Shall we constitute a General Reserve ? ’
- ‘ Will it be a Reserve for the whole front from the North Sea to the Adriatic ? ’
- ‘ How shall it be disposed ? ’
- ‘ Who will command it ? ’

GENERAL FOCH said that, in the existing condition of our front, we had to defend a line from Nieupoort to Venice without knowing where the enemy was concentrating or where or when the attacks would be made. In this situation it was difficult to envisage completely the question of reserves. Nevertheless, the necessity of having a Reserve was absolutely indisputable. Moreover, there was no doubt that the reserves should be constituted for the whole front from the North Sea to the Adriatic, and consequently it should be drawn from the British, French and Italian Armies. This Reserve must be additional to the divisions which each army has behind its own front. It was also necessary to have some authority to conserve the reserves and to decide when the time has come to use them, to arrange for their transport to the north or south, and to decide all details in conjunction with the commanders of the armies to whom they might be

sent. To summarise, there must be one authority, able to constitute, conserve, and prepare for the employment of the General Reserve by the various armies, in agreement with the commanders. When the moment arrives to make use of the Reserve the same authority must decide on their use, must arrange for their transport, and feed the battle-line in which the Reserve might be utilised. As the Reserve might be utilised to support any of the Allies, the central authority must be Inter-Allied in character. *It must be able and entitled to make all the necessary preparations.* Moreover, this Inter-Allied organ must be required to take decisions if the Governments were not in session at Versailles. *In fact, it must be an Inter-Ally organ of execution.* The only question that arises is as to how this central authority should be constituted. If he were asked for a concrete proposal he would suggest to bring together the Chiefs of the Staff who advise their Governments on the different questions, in order that they might carry out their duties in agreement. To these principal members of the central organ there should be added representatives of the American Army and of the Belgian Army."

Serious discussions were to arise later when the time came for the execution of the resolutions. The
Robertson's
approval Reply made by Sir William Robertson to General Foch's speech should therefore be read with the greatest attention.

"GENERAL ROBERTSON said that *he was in general agreement with General Foch in regard to the necessity of creating a General Reserve.* The fundamental question, however, was the command of the

Reserves. If this were settled, the composition of the Reserves would settle itself. *He himself doubted the need of the General Reserve at the moment, because most of the Allied troops were needed where they were, except in Italy. Any day, however, it might be necessary to form the proposed Reserve, and therefore the question of the organisation should be studied in detail.* He agreed with General Foch that the best persons to control the Reserve would be the Chiefs of the Staff. This arrangement would perfectly well suit Great Britain and France, but it would not suit Italy as well, as the Italians had no Chief of the Staff, except with the Commander-in-Chief of the army. He also understood that General Pershing commanded all the American troops in France. The questions of the Italian and American representation would want working out in detail, but these minor difficulties could be surmounted. *Whoever commands the Reserve must be in a position to issue orders immediately the emergency arises."*

This sentence emphatically expresses Sir William Robertson's opinion. He insists on the importance of confining authority over the disposal of the Reserves to men on the spot. This should be noted because there was subsequently a great controversy on this point.

"The central controlling body, however, should interfere as little as possible with the Commanders-in-Chief, who were responsible to their respective Governments. What the central body had to do was to perform those duties which could not be undertaken by the Commander-in-Chief of any one of the fronts."

What Sir William Robertson states must be remarked. He says he is in general agreement with Foch on the necessity of creating a General Reserve for an emergency. He also approves the idea of a composite reserve with an independent controlling board and his only doubt is as to the time when it ought to be brought into existence. As to the composition of the controlling authority, he is insistent that so far as France and Britain are concerned, the Chiefs of the Staff would be the best choice.

Throughout the discussion it was made quite clear that this General Reserve, whilst acting in consultation with the Commanders-in-Chief, should be independent of them as far as the allocation of the troops constituting the forces of the General Reserve was concerned. There was therefore no question of principle raised either by Robertson, Pétain or Haig in opposition to the idea of an independent General Reserve. M. Clemenceau put it with his usual clarity and force when he said :—

*Clemenceau's
definition of
the scheme*

“ . . . At the moment he did not want to discuss the question, but merely to know what was intended. . . . He understood that each General would have a reserve of his own ; for example, there would be French, British, Italian and American reserves. In this scheme he did not see how the great army of reserves which he wanted was to be created. He did not want to discuss the question for the moment from a military point of view, but merely from one of common sense. If each General had the free disposition of his own reserves what would happen ? When one General was attacked he would gradually use up his reserves

until there was none left. In the meanwhile, the General commanding the adjacent army might have the whole of his reserves in hand. Hence a situation of great danger might arise. When the question of creating an Inter-Allied Reserve had been raised it had been with the idea that, as we could not have a single Commander-in-Chief, such as a Hannibal or a Charlemagne, we might at least have a Commander of Reserves. *He considered it very desirable that we should build up an Army Reserve which could be sent to any point where it would be useful."*

Generals Cadorna, Pétain and Bliss showed clearly that they were thoroughly cognisant of the nature of the transaction. An answer given by General Pétain to a question put by Signor Orlando makes this clear :—

"SIGNOR ORLANDO suggested that when General Pétain talked of the reserves being disposed of by the new central body he understood that this did not apply to the reserves at the disposal of particular armies. He understood that each army would continue to have its own reserves in addition to those under the Inter-Allied central body.

GENERAL PÉTAİN replied in the affirmative. The idea was to constitute an Inter-Allied Reserve in addition to the local reserves of the armies."

The principle of a separated and independent General Reserve having been generally accepted, and it having been made abundantly clear that it should not be under the control of the Commanders-in-Chief, but of a central body to be constituted, the Council

then proceeded to consider its composition and the constitution of the body which should control it.

Ultimately the following resolution was adopted unanimously :—

*Unanimous
agreement*

1. The Supreme War Council decided on the creation of a General Reserve for the whole of the armies on the Western, Italian and Balkan Fronts.

2. The Supreme War Council delegates to an Executive composed of the Permanent Military Representatives of Great Britain, Italy and the United States of America, with General Foch for France, the following powers to be exercised in consultation with the Commanders-in-Chief of the armies concerned :—

(a) To determine the strength in all arms and composition of the General Reserve, and the contribution of each national army thereto.

(b) To select the localities in which the General Reserve is normally to be stationed.

(c) To make arrangements for the transportation and concentration of the General Reserve in the different areas.

(d) To decide and issue orders as to the time, place and period of employment of the General Reserve ; the orders of the Executive Committee for the movement of the General Reserve shall be transmitted in the manner and by the persons who shall be designated by the Supreme War Council for that purpose in each particular case.

(e) To determine the time, place and strength of the counter-offensive, and then to hand over to one or more of the Commanders-in-Chief the

necessary troops for the operation. The moment this movement of the General Reserve, or any part of it, shall have begun, it will come under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief to whose assistance it is consigned.

(f) Until the movement of the General Reserve begins, it will, for all purposes of discipline, instruction and administration, be under the orders of the respective Commanders-in-Chief, but no movement can be ordered except by the Executive Committee.

3. In case of irreconcilable differences of opinion on a point of importance connected with the General Reserve, any Military Representative has the right to appeal to the Supreme War Council.

4. In order to facilitate its decisions the Executive Committee has the right to visit any theatre of war.

5. The Supreme War Council will nominate the President of the Executive Committee from among the members of the Committee.

I proposed that the new body should have a President and that that President should be General Foch. I stated my reasons thus :—

“ He (MR. LLOYD GEORGE) thought it very desirable that as the proposed Committee was to have executive powers it should have a President. Some members of the Supreme War Council desired to insert the name of the President in the text which constitutes the body, but his own view was

*I propose
Foch*

that it was best not to insert the name. It was preferable that the Supreme War Council should nominate the President. The President of the Committee must necessarily have special qualifications, and the members of the Supreme War Council had agreed—that is to say, the three heads of Governments attending that meeting had agreed, and in the absence of the President of the United States had ventured to assume the latter's concurrence—that the right man to be President was General Foch, on account of his experience, his record and his energy, his great military gifts and his reputation.

GENERAL BLISS said he was sure that the three Prime Ministers were right in assuming that President Wilson would acquiesce in this suggestion.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE went on to give the reasons why he and his colleagues had come to this decision. General Foch was loyal not only to France, but also to the Allies. When the British Army in Flanders was in difficulties he threw all his weight into rendering it assistance. So prompt and generous was that assistance that General Foch might almost have been an Englishman himself. Again when Italy was in trouble General Foch, without any hesitation and on his own responsibility, decided to send troops to her aid. General Foch therefore commanded the confidence not only of the French but also of the British and Italians, and he was glad to hear, the Americans. They could be quite sure that as President of the Committee, General Foch would be quite unbiased. He had, therefore, great pleasure in announcing this decision of the Supreme War Council."

I had already put the suggestion before M. Clemenceau and Signor Orlando at a private conference, and made the proposal with their concurrence.

The military policy formulated by the Versailles Inter-Allied Staff was thus the one ultimately adopted by the Council and accepted by the

Principles of Allies. Its principles were :—
the policy

1. The organisation of the whole of the forces of the Allies for defence against the German attack on the basis of a united front. To achieve this aim, power to be given to a Central Authority to form and direct a General Reserve available for use at any part of the front where that Authority deemed it advisable to throw them in for defence or counter-attack. The Council appointed General Foch President of an Inter-Allied body of Generals who constituted the authority in control of the General Reserve. In the West, Foch was ultimately given the sole command of the Allied Armies. That was undoubtedly an improvement on the original plan. But he was so easily the dominant personality on the Board that in effect the scheme would have given him supreme direction of the Allied strategy in the West.

2. To watch the situation in case an unexpectedly favourable development should furnish an opportunity for vigorous offensive action. The defensive was "not to be of a merely passive character, but to be worked out definitely and scientifically, with the intention of gaining the maximum advantage from any opportunities offered in the Western theatre." Foch was the only

General who was confident that opportunities of this kind might arise in 1918.

The Versailles discussion ended in complete accord between all the statesmen and Generals of the Allies as to the plan of campaign to be pursued by the Allied Armies on all fronts during the year 1918.

I have no recollection of any dissent being expressed by anyone when the resolutions, ultimately adopted, were put to the meeting, and there is no record of any protest from any quarter.

There was a very free discussion, and statesmen and Generals expressed their minds very fully. But neither at the time that the resolution was put to the meeting, nor after it dispersed, did the Government receive any notification from any of the Generals that they disapproved of the conclusions at which the Council had arrived.

APPENDIX I

NOTE 12

THE Military Representatives have the honour to inform you that at their Meeting held on 21st January, 1918, they passed the following Resolutions :—

1. In submitting to the Supreme War Council their advice on the military action to be undertaken during 1918, the Military Representatives think it necessary to place before the Supreme War Council in the briefest possible manner the grounds on which their advice is based.

2. Looking out over all the theatres of war they examined the state of affairs both in the main theatres and in the secondary theatres, first of all from the point of view of the security of the fronts in those theatres, and then from the point of view of the opportunity which may present themselves for gaining a decisive or, at any rate, far-reaching success in any of those theatres.

3. It was assumed that the United Kingdom was safe from all serious invasion and that the necessary measures, both naval, military and air for its defence against the contingency of an attack, involved no interference with the operations of the British force overseas.

4. It was agreed, after the most careful and exhaustive examination, that the safety of France could also be assured. But in view of the weight of attack which the enemy can bring to bear upon this front, an attack *which may possibly, in the opinion of the Military Representatives, attain a strength of 96 Divisions, exclusive of "roulement,"* they feel obliged to add that France will be safe during 1918 *only* under certain conditions, viz. :—

(a) That the French and British forces in France are continuously maintained at their present total aggregate strength, and receive the expected reinforcement of not less than two American Divisions a month.

(b) That there shall be a substantial progressive increase in the total Allied equipment in guns of all calibres, in machine-guns, in aeroplanes and in tanks, with the personnel necessary to man them, and the most effective co-ordinated employment of those and all other mechanical devices.

(c) That every possible measure shall be taken for strengthening and co-ordinating the Allied system of defences, more particularly in the sectors most liable to a heavy attack.

(d) That the rail transportation be improved and co-ordinated.

(e) That the whole Allied Front in France be treated as a single strategic field of action, and that the disposition of the reserves, the periodic rearrangement of the point of junction between the various Allied forces on the actual front, and all other arrangements should be dominated by this consideration.

5. It was agreed that Italy was safe, but again under certain conditions, viz. :—

(i) That the Italian Army be reformed, trained and re-equipped with artillery before 1st May, and that several positions in rear of the present line be constructed on modern principles.

(ii) That the power of rapid rail transport be increased both in the interior of Italy itself, and between Italy and France in order to secure strategic unity of action over the two theatres.

(iii) That, in addition to the necessary measures taken against pacifism by the Italian Government itself, the Allies should assist Italy by the provision of coal, wheat and other necessities, as well as financially, in order to prevent the creation of economic conditions which would diminish the strength of the interior resistance of the country.

6. If the assumptions in paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 are accepted then we have got this far in our examination of the problem, viz. : that the enemy cannot in 1918 gain a definite military decision in the main theatres which would enable him to break finally the resistance of any of the Allied Powers.

7. If the enemy cannot gain a final decision against the Allies the question arises whether there is any opportunity in the course of 1918 for the Allies to secure, in the main Western theatres, a final, or even a far-reaching, decision against the enemy? The Military Representatives are of the opinion that, apart from such measure of success as is implied in the failure of the enemy's offensive, or

may be attained by local counter-strokes, and leaving out of account such improbable and unforeseeable contingencies as the internal collapse of the Enemy Powers, or the revival of Russia as a serious military factor, no such decision is likely to be secured during the fighting period of 1918. Neither the addition of the American troops in view during this period, nor such reinforcements as could be secured for any one of the main theatres by withdrawing from the secondary theatres any margin of troops that may be available above the necessities of local defence, would make a sufficient difference in the relative position of the opposing forces to justify the hope of attaining such a decision. This should not prevent the Allied General Staffs closely watching the situation in case an unexpected favourable development should furnish an opportunity for vigorous offensive actions for which they should always be prepared. In any case the defensive on the Western Front should not be of merely a passive character, but be worked out definitely and scientifically, with the intention of gaining the maximum advantage from any opportunities offered in this theatre. A detailed consideration of the nature of the measures that should be envisaged is given in a paper which is appended as an annexe to this Note.

8. The Allies are therefore confronted with a fundamental, though not permanent, change in the conditions upon which their strategy has to be based, as compared with the conditions, existing or anticipated, as long as the Russian Armies kept the field. They are accordingly obliged to consider how that strategy must be modified in order to take the fullest advantage out of such

opportunities as remain open to them during the phase of deadlock on the Western Fronts. In other words, pending such a change in the balance of forces as we hope to reach in 1919 by the steady influx of American troops, guns, aeroplanes, tanks, etc., and by the progressive exhaustion of the enemy's staying power, it remains to consider what action can meanwhile be taken against the enemy, elsewhere than in the main Western theatres, which may enable us to secure a decision far-reaching in its effect upon the political situation in the Near East and in Russia, both during and after the War, and valuable in paving the way towards a subsequent definitive decision against the enemy's main armies. To allow the year to pass without an attempt to secure a decision in any theatre of war, and to leave the initiative entirely to the enemy would, in the opinion of the Military Representatives, be a grave error in strategy apart from the moral effect such a policy might produce upon the Allied nations.

9. The possibility of achieving any far-reaching decision in the Balkan theatre is clearly excluded, for the present at any rate, by the strength and comparative homogeneity of the enemy forces, and by the great superiority of the enemy's system of communications. It is, indeed, possible that in this theatre the Allied forces may find themselves heavily attacked, and may be compelled to give ground. Such a contingency, though undesirable in itself, need give rise to no serious apprehensions provided always that adequate preparations are made in good time for the occupation of shorter and stronger lines covering the mainland of Greece and, if possible, Salonika.

10. There remains the Turkish theatre. To inflict such a crushing series of defeats upon the Turkish Armies as would lead to the final collapse of Turkey and her elimination from the War would not only have the most far-reaching results upon the general military situation, but might also if not too long deferred, be in time to enable the Allies to get into direct touch with, and give effective help to, such elements of resistance to German domination as may still exist in Roumania and Southern Russia. Even a lesser measure of success such as would definitely liberate the Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire from the Turkish yoke and compel the Germans to divert considerable forces to the East in order to save Turkey from destruction, would, both from the point of view of the military situation and from that of eventual peace negotiations, greatly strengthen the Allied position, and be worth any effort that can be made compatibly with the security of our defence in the Western theatres.

11. The present condition of Turkey is one of almost complete material and moral exhaustion. The Turkish forces have progressively dwindled, till they now amount to 250,000 men at the utmost, and will dwindle even more rapidly if seriously attacked, owing to the entire lack of reserves. Such as they are these forces are dispersed, and are necessarily dispersed over enormous areas. The communications between the different fronts are so defective that any transfers of troops can only be carried out extremely slowly and with heavy wastage through sickness and desertion. The main railway communication with Constantinople and the Central Powers is itself of very limited capacity, and

vulnerable to air attacks. Reinforcement of troops or munitions from Germany could only be accumulated very gradually, and the sending of them would involve a heavy strain on the enemy's transport resources.

12. The Military Representatives realise that in view of the potential menace to the Western Front, as well as in view of difficulties of tonnage, there can be no question of a transfer of troops on any considerable scale from the Western to the Eastern theatre of operations under present circumstances. They consider, however, that the existing Allied forces in Palestine and Mesopotamia are already sufficiently superior to the enemy in numbers, equipment and morale to justify the hope that successful operations can be carried out with these forces providing they are maintained at full strength. They would also strongly urge that any additional minor reinforcements, such as could be provided by the termination of the East African operations, by the raising of new units in India or in the French possessions, by the transfer of superfluous mounted troops from the Western theatre, or possibly at a later date by the transfer of one or two divisions from Salonika, if the enemy make no serious offensive in the Balkans, and the organisation of the Greek Army makes sufficient progress to enable it to be relied upon to replace the Divisions sent away, should be concentrated in the Turkish theatre.

13. The problem of securing a decisive result in this theatre is, however, not so much one of numbers as of means of communication. The difficulty is not so much that of dislodging the

Turkish troops from a particular position as of being able to follow them up, prevent them rallying, receiving reinforcements and reorganising and so convert their retreat into rout and final annihilation. This is a question partly of the mobility of the Allied forces themselves, i.e., of their power to advance rapidly and at a considerable distance from their nearest railhead or port, and partly of the rapidity and energy with which the Allies can construct new railways—normal gauge, narrow light or aerial, as the case may be—repair existing ones and re-equip them with rolling stock, and open up and improve successive new supplementary bases in the coast ports. The effort required in this respect is a great one. But upon it depends the whole prospect of achieving any decisive result for the Allied cause in 1918, and looking upon the resources in material and in technical skill possessed by the Allies, not only in Europe, but in Egypt, India, the British Dominions, and the United States, the effort should not be beyond the compass of our powers.

14. The question of tonnage and escort is a serious limiting factor both as regards the actual supply of provisions and munitions for the troops and of railway material, and as regards the possibility of strategic operations depending on the movement of troops by sea. Everything that would facilitate the development of sources of supply east of the Suez Canal or locally—such as, for instance, the occupation of the Hauran—would ease the tonnage and escort situation in the Mediterranean and to that extent also help to liberate tonnage and escort for military movements by sea, if such movements were desirable for strategical reasons.

15. Aviation is of particular importance in this theatre of war, both because of the opportunities for strategical air offensives against the Turkish communications, and because of the general advantages which superiority in the air gives in regions where communications are limited, concealment difficult and anti-aircraft arrangements defective. This superiority is enjoyed by the Allied forces in the Turkish theatre at present and the necessary measures should be taken to maintain and, if possible, increase it. The creation of independent strategic aviation bases in Cyprus and in the Aegean, and the organisation of the naval air services in the Eastern Mediterranean for concentrated strategic offensives, are essential elements in any scheme of serious operations against Turkey.

16. In considering both the Turkish situation in itself and the political objects which the Allies have in view in this quarter of the world, the Military Representatives are convinced of the necessity that strategy and policy should go absolutely hand in hand. While the success of the military operations may of itself bring about profound changes in the political situation in Turkey and the Near East generally, it is certain that these changes can be stimulated, and that success hastened on, by a definite, co-ordinated and vigorous political offensive both among the non-Turkish races of the Ottoman Empire and among the Turks themselves. Any lack of coherence on the part of the Foreign Offices in dealing with the political problems directly or indirectly connected with the Near Eastern situation, any evidence of mutual jealousy or of individual self-seeking, will

be bound to prejudice not only the future settlement but the actual military operations.

17. The aspects upon which stress has been laid in the preceding paragraphs emphasise the need for the most energetic co-operation and the closest co-ordination not only of the Allied Military forces in Palestine, Mesopotamia and Armenia, but also of the Allied Naval and Air Forces along the whole coast of Asiatic Turkey, of the local Governments in Egypt, India, Cyprus, or from whatever country materials, supplies or labour can be furnished, and not least, of the Allied Foreign Offices. It is essential to the success of the offensive against Turkey that it should be envisaged not as a series of disconnected operations, but as a single co-ordinated scheme whose object is to eliminate one of the Enemy Powers from the War.

18. The Military Representatives do not consider it part of their function to prescribe the particular series of operations on the different fronts by which an offensive against Turkey can best be carried out. That can only be done by the Commander-in-Chief to whom the task of co-ordinating and executing these operations is entrusted. There are certain more immediate objectives, indeed, such as Haifa, the friendly grain-producing region of the Hauran, Damascus and Beirut, which seem clearly indicated not only by their military, economic and political importance, but also by the prospect of striking effective blows at the Turkish forces which are not likely to abandon them without a contest. But the object of the Military Representatives is not to suggest specific geographical objectives, but to lay down a general line of policy which, to whatever

extent it succeeds, will materially strengthen the position of the Allies, whether from the point of view of the further prosecution of the struggle in 1919, or from that of the willingness of the enemy to concede reasonable terms of peace.

19. From this point of view the Military Representatives having examined with the greatest care the whole problem of the War of 1918, having laid down that *if certain conditions are fulfilled*, it will not be within the power of the enemy to reach a decision adverse to the Allies in the main Western theatres, having also come to the conclusion that the Allies cannot, apart from certain at present unforeseeable contingencies, in those theatres obtain a real decision against the enemy, and having considered all the factors bearing upon the military and political situation in the Turkish theatre, are of the opinion that the Allies should undertake a decisive offensive against Turkey with a view to the annihilation of the Turkish Armies and the collapse of Turkish resistance.

WEYGAND,
Military Representative,
French Section
Supreme War
Council.

HENRY WILSON,
General Military
Representative,
British Section
Supreme War
Council.

L. CADORNA,
Military Representative,
Italian Section
Supreme War
Council.

Versailles,
21st January, 1918.



APPENDIX II

CLEMENCEAU'S FIRST ADDRESS TO THE SUPREME ALLIED
COUNCIL

I SUGGEST that the first task of the Supreme War Council is to consider the nature of the military campaigns to be undertaken in 1918. In order to enable us to reach a decision I suggest to my colleagues that we should invite our Permanent Military Advisers to study the whole situation in detail and to advise us as to the operations which they recommend.

The first step to be taken is for each Government to call for the views of its own General Staff, and these views should at once be transmitted to the Permanent Military Advisers of the Supreme War Council, and I would invite my colleagues to give instructions in this sense without delay.

There are certain recent changes in the situation to which I think we should particularly direct the attention of our Permanent Military Advisers in making their report to us.

The first of these is the situation in Russia. I propose that we should instruct our Permanent Military Advisers to assume as a basis of their studies that, in 1918, Russia cannot be counted on to render any effective military assistance. It will be for them to estimate, on the basis of the intelligence they will obtain from the General Staffs of the Allies, the

amount of the forces which Russia's impotence will set free for operations on other fronts.

The second new factor is the situation in Italy. After a grave reverse, which came near to disaster, equilibrium has been re-established for the time being on the Italian Front. For the first time in the War, substantial British and French forces are engaged on that front. It is undeniable that the detachment of these forces makes a considerable drain on the strength of the Anglo-French forces on the Western Front, and correspondingly weakens their power of offence and defence. The fact that such large forces are concentrated on the Italian Front necessarily raises the question whether offensive operations are not indicated.

A third new factor introduced into the situation of 1918 is the gradual maturing of the forces of our new Ally, the United States of America, on the Western Front. To what extent can we count on the co-operation of the United States Army at different dates in 1918? This depends, to a large extent, upon the shipping situation, which itself constitutes one of the most vital factors in the investigations of the Permanent Military Advisers. During the last few days the shipping experts of the nations concerned have been examining this question, and they have been invited to prepare data as to the number of American divisions which it should be assumed for the purposes of calculation, can be transported to and maintained in France during 1918. The results of their investigations will be placed before you.

The restoration of the shipping situation itself has an important bearing on the intensity of the Allied effort in 1918. In order to avert the risk that any of the Allies may sink from exhaustion, a calamity

which, at all costs, must be avoided, the restoration of the shipping situation is essential. Apart from naval measures for reducing our losses, two means are available for this. The first is to reduce our dependence upon imports by stimulating home production as much as circumstances permit, and by cutting down the needs of the population as far as possible ; and the second is to increase the number of ships. Both these essentials make some demand upon our available man-power, and to that extent limit the number of men available for the armies. The Permanent Military Advisers must obtain from their respective Governments an estimate of the man-power available for 1918, after providing the bare necessities for ensuring the staying power of the nations concerned. I would ask that the conservation of man-power shall not be overlooked.

If the amount of shipping available affects the intensity of the military operations, the Permanent Military Advisers must also bear in mind that, conversely, the character of the military operations decided on and prepared for in 1918 reacts no less on the amount of shipping available for the accumulation of reinforcements in the future. For example, a prolonged operation of the character attempted on the Somme in 1916, and in Flanders in 1917, involved an expenditure of material far greater than defensive operations or than offensive operations of the type of the recent attacks on the Chemin des Dames or in the region of Cambrai. The accumulation of the vast supplies of warlike stores required for the former type of attack, and the transport of the raw materials for their manufacture, involve the use of tonnage which would otherwise be available for the transport of American troops.

I would propose to invite our Permanent Military Advisers in their examination of the problem, not to forget that the War has become largely one of exhaustion. It may be that victory will be achieved by endurance rather than by a military decision. Russia has already collapsed, at any rate, for the present, but it must be remembered that Turkey and Austria are neither of them very far from collapse. The final objective now, as formerly, is the overthrow of Prussian militarism, but I would ask the Permanent Military Advisers to weigh carefully whether possibly that object may not be brought nearer final achievement by the overthrow, first of all, of Germany's allies, and the isolation of Germany: whether in fact the final overthrow of Germany may not best be reserved until the forces of the Allies, greatly augmented by a fully matured American Army, can be focused and concentrated as a climax to the War on this final objective.

In conclusion, I suggest that each Government represented here to-day should give its definite undertaking to furnish to our Permanent Military Advisers all the information that they require for the examination of these grave problems.

Apart from the question of primary importance which I have just referred to, there is a point of great immediate importance to which the attention of the Permanent Military Advisers should be directed. I refer to the military situation in the Balkans. I suggest that it is a proper subject for present inquiry by our Military Advisers whether the Allied forces in the Balkans are so disposed, and in such strength, that they may be expected to hold their own against any force which can reasonably be brought against them.

There is one point which I would ask our Permanent Military Representatives to bear carefully in mind, namely, that their function is to advise the Supreme War Council as a whole and not merely as the representatives of their respective nations on the Council. They are required to view the problems confronting them not from a national standpoint, but from that of the Allies as a whole. I trust that, as far as possible, their advice will be unanimous, and that it will be submitted to the Supreme War Council in a collective form carrying with it the signature of each of the Permanent Military Representatives.

Paris,

28th November, 1917.

CHAPTER LXXV

EXTENSION OF THE BRITISH FRONT

ONE of the most tiresome questions which British and French Governments had to adjust from time to time was the extension of the line to be held by the British Army on the Western Front. The French were compelled to put forth their utmost effort in the first years of the War when we were not ready. As our Army grew and grew with amazing rapidity, the French, who had borne the brunt of the fighting during the first two years of the War and had sustained immense losses, naturally pressed us to take over more and still more of the line which they had held so gallantly, but at such cost, whilst we were preparing. Our Generals sometimes treated these demands with consideration. Now and again, when they were incompatible with ambitious plans they were cherishing, they were inclined to be sticky or almost stingy. The delays caused by disputes over extension of the line were responsible for some serious setbacks in the War. I have already dealt with the postponement of the Nivelle offensive, due partly to Haig's reluctance to take over more line. Nivelle could not constitute the army of manoeuvre that was an essential part of his scheme until Haig had released some of the French divisions by taking over part of the line. Decisive weeks were wasted over this somewhat selfish feud.

The consequent postponement of the operation enabled the Germans to bring up reserves from the East. I shall in a later chapter show how the delays and the temper aroused by taking over more line on the Somme in the winter of 1917-1918 were fatal to the effective organisation of defences in that sector which was attacked so successfully by the Germans, and equally disastrous in its influence on the distribution of forces and particularly of reserves. In the absence of a united front, taking human nature as it is, these unfortunate clashes were inevitable. Great generals, even in the exercise of their profession, are not above the pettiness in motive and temper which has marred many a promising enterprise in other spheres.

At the end of 1917 the British Expeditionary Forces of all ranks and services in all the theatres of war numbered 2,759,419, excluding *Strength of British Expeditionary Forces* coloured labour corps. We had 1,978,393 men in France and Flanders. Our great new army had fought its first battle on the Somme in the summer of 1916. Up to that date the brunt of the fighting and therefore of the casualties had fallen on the French. The French resisted the German invading army in September, 1914, in a succession of great battles fought on a front of hundreds of miles. The French losses were enormous. The great offensives of 1915 in Artois and Champagne were in the main conducted with French troops. And the sanguinary Battle of Verdun which lasted for several months and cost the defending army hundreds of thousands was fought exclusively between the French and the Germans. Our losses on that scale began at the Battle of the Somme in the third campaign of the War. France was now coming to an

end of her resources in young men fit for battle. Sir Douglas Haig called attention to this exhaustion when he stated his case for the Passchendaele offensive. On the other hand, the contribution of men we sent overseas to our armies from Britain and the Dominions had grown each year and in 1918 we reached the climax. It was inevitable, therefore, that the French should constantly press us to take over more line.

Colonel Repington, one of the most brilliant of our military critics, and one who was accorded the special confidence of the Army leaders at home and was chosen by them as their special champion and spokesman in the Press against meddlesome politicians, put the French case for the taking over of more line by the British Army in poignant language. Needless to say, he was not stating the facts in order to support that plea. He was using them in another conjunction and for a totally different purpose. They are nevertheless so relevant to an examination of the merits of this particular controversy that I quote them. Motive cannot alter facts. Writing on January 24th, 1918, after pointing out that the French Army was seriously reduced in numerical strength, he adds :—

*Repington
on French
losses*

“ I want to tell the people of England, and particularly those ministerial poltroons who bleat about our losses, that our total casualties killed, wounded, and missing—since the War began—are but little higher than the number of the French dead. The only suitable recognition that we can make of French heroism is to help them in their hour of need.”

In view of the subsequent history of the French

sector so reluctantly and tardily taken over by the British G.H.Q., and of the animadversions surrounding the transaction, a full statement of the facts regarding it are of considerable historic importance. Fortunately, there exists abundant official record of all the proceedings, and I propose to leave these to speak for themselves.

In the summer of 1917, the feeling steadily gained ground among the French that the British ought to be willing to take over a larger proportion of the line. They would have much preferred our helping them in this way than our setting out on the "duck's march through Flanders," to quote Foch's apt phrase. In July, a French Deputy who was chairman of a Parliamentary Committee appointed to examine the question of French man-power, approached our Ambassador in Paris with the plea that we should relieve the strain on the depleted resources of French manhood by extending our front. They were facing the problem of war-weariness among their people, the mutinies in their Army, the casualties incurred in a struggle where they had hitherto borne by far the largest part of the fighting and the loss. The density of troops on our front was double or treble that of the French. Besides, the French, with a smaller total population than we, had put nearly all their able-bodied manhood in uniform, and without the help of some of these, their lands could not be tilled nor their harvests gathered, and the nation would be threatened with food shortage. We had (so it was contended) far too many troops in England.

There existed contrary arguments. Considerable sectors of the French Front were "quiet"; there

was little military activity on them and no great likelihood of major offensives ; and the French had considerable room for manœuvre behind their part of the line, if they should be dislodged from their positions, without being perilously driven away from contact with their bases. The British, on the other hand, cramped in the northern part of the line, had little room for manœuvre, and a serious loss of ground would drive them into the sea or away from their bases at the channel ports ; and hardly any part of their front could be called " quiet " : it was the scene of constant military activity, and opposite to it there were large German forces. Yet after allowing for these arguments, there was still a marked disproportion between the forces behind the respective fronts ; and the actual facts of gigantic losses sustained by the French, the temporarily weakened morale of their troops, and the desperate shortage of workers for their essential agriculture, could not be gainsaid.

Accordingly, when at the Boulogne Conference of September 25th, 1917, M. Painlevé, the French Prime Minister, accompanied by General Foch, his Chief of Staff, met Sir William Robertson and myself, and reported the strong pressure of the demand in the French Chamber for the British to take over a larger part of the front, we could not refuse to consider this request. At this discussion Sir William Robertson sympathised with the French demand and considered that it ought to be met. He said that :—

" the question must be regulated on the basis of next year's plans of operations. The matter should, therefore, be left for arrangement between Field-Marshal Haig and General Pétain as soon as

the offensive operations now in progress come to an end. So far as the Governments were concerned, the principle of taking over more of the line was already admitted."

On the other hand, it was clear that the military considerations involved in such a step must in the first instance be a matter for examination and, if possible, adjustment by and between the Commanders-in-Chief of the two armies concerned. We eventually reached agreement in the following terms:--

"The British Government, having accepted in principle the extension of the line held by the British Army on the Western Front, the two Governments are agreed that the question of the amount of the extension and the time at which it should take place should be left for arrangement between the two Commanders-in-Chief."

This agreement I communicated on the following day to Sir Douglas Haig, whom I visited at G.H.Q.

The Commander-in-Chief did not give a direct refusal to the French demand. But he certainly did not entertain it with cordiality.

That very morning he had captured a few kilometres of Flemish mire, and General Charteris came into the room whilst we were discussing the French appeal to inform his Chief that he had received the most reliable reports showing that three more German divisions had been completely shattered. He added to these the 50 or more enemy divisions which had already been destroyed. Haig naturally felt at such a moment that to send the troops to occupy quiet trenches was

*Haig and
Pétain left
to settle
adjustment*

*Haig's
attitude*

a poor use to make of a victorious army. Pétain's tired and demoralised troops were good enough for that. It was evident to me that the fundamental conflict of views between the British and French commands as to the strategy to be pursued once more complicated the issue as it had already done when a similar proposal was made in the early spring. In the case of Nivelle the clash of plans involved an element of personal rivalry between two Commanders who each sought for his own army the leading part in a great operation which promised decisive results. In this case the French Generals considered Haig's idea of an offensive enterprise to be premature. Foch and Pétain were strongly of the opinion that the new situation created by the collapse of Russia, the deep repugnance felt by all ranks of fighting men in the French Army to mass attacks on the German entrenchments, and the accession of an unprepared America to the Allied side, could be best met by a suspension of great offensives, until the American Army was ready to throw in its full weight; and meanwhile that a defensive attitude should be maintained, varied by limited offensives whenever and wherever the opportunity was favourable for striking a blow at the enemy. They also advocated pressure on other and weaker flanks of the enemy line on other battle fronts. Haig on the other hand urged a concentrated offensive on a great scale with a view to driving the enemy out of Flanders and outflanking him in that direction. The disastrous and costly failure of that plan only stimulated him to justify his project by a resumption of his attacks in the spring of 1918. He did not desist from his intention until it became clear to him that the reinforcements available could not furnish

a number of men sufficient to overcome an army which was reinforced by picked divisions withdrawn from Russia. A man reluctantly forced to abandon plans which seem to him to present hopes of glorious achievement never throws himself whole-heartedly into the working of alternative schemes which he has consistently set aside as inferior to his own. It looks to him too much like an admission of a fundamental error of judgment in his original conception. This mood working on an obstinate mind accounts for what happened in the rearrangement of forces rendered necessary when a great German offensive in the spring of 1918 grew certain. It was this mood which I encountered in my conversation with Marshal Haig. I found him stubbornly opposed to the proposal. He was never articulate in the expression of his views at an interview. He however promised to send me a Memorandum as to his views on the military outlook in the event of Russia being forced out of the War. That I received about the 10th October. In it he expressed his opinion about the question of extending his front. Here is an extract :—

“ The armies have undergone almost superhuman exertion and hardships during the last few months, and unless the demands made on them during the winter are reduced to a minimum they cannot be expected to respond fully to the further heavy calls entailed by a renewal of the offensive next year.”


Haig by this time realised that his break through could not be achieved, as he had confidently anticipated, in the course of this year. He therefore contemplated renewing his attacks in the same sector early in the spring of 1918.

*Wants to
renew Flanders
offensive*

“ I urge this point very strongly and it entails resistance to any French demands on us to take over more line. A refusal by us to do so will undoubtedly be both justifiable and wise.”

Pointing out that the French Army was not in a mood for offensives, and that the British would therefore be the only attacking force, and that the French soldiers got more leave than the British, he proceeded :—

“ This aspect of the case must not be overlooked any more than the purely military arguments, and it is on popular feeling amongst the French people rather than on military argument that the French demand on us to take over more line is based. The actual extent of front measured by miles is no test of what we should hold. The true test is the relative number of enemy divisions engaged by us, and still more the rôle to be allotted to us in next year's campaign (i.e. the renewal of the offensive). For all these reasons it is necessary in my opinion to refuse to take over more line and to adhere resolutely to that refusal, even to the point of answering threats by threats if necessary.”

Haig wanted all his forces to repeat his Flanders blunder. He could not, therefore, spare a man for any other part of the front. 

The discussions between the soldiers passed into that phase, all too familiar among the Franco-British forces throughout the War until we eventually achieved unity of command, of pleas and protests and counter-protests, of appeals by the respective

Commanders-in-Chief to their Governments for support, and of reproaches, consultations and official representations, leading to nothing but misunderstanding. These constituted the usual dreary preliminaries to every compromise agreement. Valuable time was wasted, and essential defensive preparations in the contested area were completely neglected.

The French Government continued to urge upon me the necessity of an extension of the British line. But in accordance with the decision of the Boulogne Conference, I left the matter at this stage for the soldiers to discuss between themselves. The Cabinet thought the French had a case for an extension of our front, and that opinion was imparted to Haig, but the details were left to be settled between the Commanders. I therefore urged the C.I.G.S. to arrange an early meeting between Haig and Pétain. That took place about mid-October at Amiens and resulted in an agreement about extension, but not about strategy.

The nature of the agreement is stated by Marshal Pétain in a letter by him on October 23rd to the British Commander-in-Chief :—

*Agreement
reached
between Haig
and Pétain*

“ In accordance with my expressed request you have fixed the date for the extension of your front for the last week in November. The relief operations will thus have no repercussion upon the development of the battle in Flanders. The number of divisions which you are intending to put into the line will easily bring your right as far as the Oise.”

He had pressed Haig to extend his line a little further to the south. He gives his reasons for that

request in this letter. Haig in his reply on the 2nd November writes :—

“ As I have already told you, I am prepared to prolong my right up to the Oise ; I can even fall in with your wishes by relieving a sector, insignificant in extent, south of the river.”

The limit of this further extension was fixed by the two Commanders-in-Chief at Barisis.

The taking-over by the British of the French line up to Barisis had thus been agreed to between Haig and Pétain by the beginning of November. It is important to note that no extension of the British line further than this took place before the great German offensive in March.

The agreement between the Generals was only the beginning of trouble. Haig thoroughly disliked the idea of parting with divisions which he had depended upon for his mass of manœuvre in the spring renewal of his Flemish campaign. He went back on the arrangement both in substance and in time. He pleaded that he could not spare the necessary divisions to carry out the full extensions he had promised. Even the restricted relief to the French which he undertook was indefinitely postponed.

The French grew impatient at this attitude. M. Clemenceau demanded to know when the promised relief was to take place. The C.I.G.S. telegraphed this query to Haig on December 1st, and got the reply that since the arrangement had been made with General Pétain he had been compelled to send divisions to Italy and to use at Cambrai those detailed to begin the relief on the French Front. As active

operations were still in progress, he did not feel justified then in carrying out any extension at all.

This was naturally a very unsatisfactory reply for the French. If we had promised five divisions to Italy, they had undertaken to send six.

Pétain wrote on December 14th to press that the relief should be begun, and told his Government that if it were not carried out he would
Clemenceau puts his foot down refuse to continue to accept responsibility for the safety of the French Front. Clemenceau, who strongly supported Pétain, thereupon sent us word that he would himself resign unless the British took over the front as far as Berry-au-bac, an extension 37 miles longer than the one originally requested. We agreed that the arrangement already entered into between the two Commanders-in-Chief for extension to Barisis must be honourably fulfilled, but we could not assent to the further demand. We succeeded in persuading Clemenceau to allow the matter of the further extension to Berry-au-bac to be referred to the Supreme War Council ; and pending its discussion there, the Military Representatives at Versailles were asked to examine the question. Information to this effect was wired to Sir Douglas Haig on December 15th.

The news decided Sir Douglas Haig. Without waiting to see what would be the verdict of Versailles, he met Pétain on December 17th and after giving a number of reasons for delay, agreed to relieve two French divisions by January 10th and complete the relief to the River Oise before the end of January. This arrangement Pétain accepted, and it was in due course carried out.

Early in January I received an urgent communication from M. Clemenceau pressing us to exercise our

authority as a Government to order Haig to agree as to the further extension requested by Pétain. As we were anxious as a Cabinet to obtain Haig's opinions on the military position as a whole, I appealed to him to come over to confer with us on the subject. Haig informed us, when the matter of the extension of the front was raised, that he was on the point of taking over the line up to the River Oise, and that General Pétain seemed to be quite satisfied with this arrangement.

As to the demand made by M. Clemenceau for a further extension, the Permanent Military Representatives at Versailles went carefully into the whole question—the relative strength of the fronts, the opposing enemy forces, the respective needs for relief and training ; and reached the conclusion that the logically right point for the juncture of the respective fronts was neither Barisis nor Berry-au-bac, but the left bank of the Ailette on the Laon-Soissons road, a point which was 14 miles beyond Barisis.

The Joint Note of the Military Representatives in which this recommendation was recorded (Joint Note No. 10), was issued on January 10th, 1918. Although Haig and Pétain had reached an agreement with regard to the extension to Barisis, Pétain, backed by Clemenceau, was at this time still pressing for more—in fact, for the extension to Berry-au-bac.

At the Meeting of the Supreme War Council which was held on February 1st, I anticipated to some extent the discussion about extension of the line by proposing that in view of the fact that the French and ourselves had no less than eleven divisions in Italy, we should bring a contingent of Italian

*Proposals of
the Versailles
representatives*

*I suggest
Italian
reinforcement
of French Front*

troops to France. The minutes record that I said :—

“ Before coming to the question of the extension of the British line, or the creation of the reserves, I suggest, if my Italian colleague would consent, that we ought to discuss the question of bringing Italian troops to the Western Front. The alternative is to bring the British and French troops from the Italian to the Western Front. This, however, is undesirable from the point of view of morale. Hence it would be better to bring Italian troops here.”

I then called attention to the figures in tables prepared by the Allied Staffs, for the information of the Supreme War Council, and I pointed out that on the Italian Front according to these tables, “ there were 1,440,000 Allied compared with 860,000 enemy combatants, a superiority of 580,000 combatants ; whereas on the French Front, the Allied superiority was only 160,000 combatants.” I further pointed out that the movement of enemy troops was towards the French rather than towards the Italian Front.

Signor Orlando, the Italian Prime Minister, said he was “ in principle in entire agreement with Mr. Lloyd George,” and he proceeded to support my proposal with emotional warmth. M. Clemenceau summed up the remarks of Signor Orlando and Baron Sonnino in the sense that the Italian Government would leave the decision as to such a movement to the new War Board which it was proposed to set up to take charge of the General Reserve. It is significant of the general attitude of the British and French Staffs that although they knew at that time that German

reinforcements for the West were pouring in from Russia, they took no steps to implement this valuable Italian promise until after March 21st. This indifference or slackness was partly due to their lack of appreciation of the fighting value of the Italian infantry, who, it is only fair to say, fought well when they ultimately came to France. But so far as the French were concerned the slackness was partly attributable to their suspicion that the proposal, if adopted, would be used by the British as a further excuse for not taking up more line.

The prospect of a possible reinforcement of the French Front by Italian troops did not therefore avail to appease the urgency of the French demand for a further extension of the British line to Berry-au-bac. When Note

*Clemenceau
urges further
extension*

No. 10 came up for review on February 2nd, M. Clemenceau proposed that since the point on the left bank of the Ailette was that fixed by the joint advice of the military experts it should be accepted, and the Commanders-in-Chief be asked to agree to arrangements for the carrying out of the recommendation. But Haig promptly protested.

“ With the effectives at present at his disposal, it was impossible for him to extend his front beyond the point that he had agreed upon with General Pétain . . . With the utmost desire to comply in every way possible with the French demands, he felt bound to point out to the Supreme War Council that with the troops now at his disposal it was quite out of the question for him to take over any more front.”

I then intervened to ask General Pétain whether he

had agreed with Sir Douglas Haig that the British Front should extend to Barisis only. Pétain replied that :—

“ it was true that there had been an agreement between himself and Sir Douglas Haig to the effect that the British Front should be extended to Barisis. Later, however, he had been compelled to ask for a further considerable extension. . . . ”

Inasmuch as it has been suggested that the British Government, and particularly myself, were responsible for forcing Sir Douglas Haig, against his better judgment, to accept this further extension, I will now quote fully the statement which I made upon the recommendation of the Supreme Council :—

“ MR. LLOYD GEORGE asked that before the Joint Note was adopted he might be allowed to put before the Supreme War Council certain very serious considerations. The *My support for Haig* Field-Marshal had said that he could hardly be held responsible for the security of his front if he had to extend his line. He had pointed out that the most vital parts of the Allied Fronts were held by the British. The British lines of communication ran parallel to their front, and the enemy were only ten miles off ; this constituted a very dangerous situation. Further, an advance of a few kilometres by the Germans on the French Front would not be a very grave matter. If, however, the Germans advanced only six miles in Flanders they would deprive us of certain valuable coal mines which at present

provide no less than ten million tons of coal a year. If they were deprived of this supply of coal it would have to be made up by Great Britain. This would mean a large diversion of labour to the coal mines, and of tonnage for the transportation of coal across the Channel. The second point was partly military and partly political in character. The French soldier by the law of his country—and he would remind the Council that the French were fighting on their own soil—got leave every four months; the British soldier on the other hand, got leave only once a year. The British Army had come to be aware of this fact, which was causing the gravest dissatisfaction. No doubt this disparity in regard to the granting of leave was in part due to the shortage of tonnage, but it was a serious consideration which could not be ignored. He would remind the Supreme War Council that the British Commander-in-Chief had said that if he had to extend his front he could not be responsible for the security of his line. If, therefore, the Council decided to accept the recommendation of the Military Representatives, a very grave responsibility would rest upon them. There were then three considerations which he wished to put before his colleagues :—

1. That the British hold a line which covered indispensable ports and valuable coal mines, neither of which was it possible for us to relinquish.

2. The question of leave.

3. The British had borne the brunt of the fighting during the past year, and as they had advanced their line in many places it was

impossible to give the men the rest they badly needed, as it was necessary to prepare new lines of defence. Further, these lines had to be constructed in the abominable climate of Flanders, which was very different from the climate of Italy, for instance.

If in addition to the dissatisfaction caused by the disparity in regard to leave, by the necessity of having to forgo their well-earned rest in order to construct new lines of defence, the British Army were told that they had to take over a new portion of the French Front they would be seriously disheartened to say the least of it. He therefore would again press that a solution of the difficulty might be found by transferring Italian divisions to France. A large contribution of Italian troops to the Western Front would, in his opinion, best solve the most difficult problem which M. Clemenceau and he had to consider. Mr. Lloyd George thought that the question of the extension of the line and that of the transference of Italian troops to Flanders should be considered together."

Signor Orlando then gave general support to my plea, and he referred to the proposal which I had made at the preceding meeting, that the difficulties should be solved by inviting the Italian Government to send divisions to France to take over this part of the line. He concluded by saying :—

"He agreed with Mr. Lloyd George that the question of the extension of the line and of Italian troops being sent to France must be considered

together, and that they were questions for the deliberation of their military experts."

After a reply from General Pétain, a note was passed to me—as far as I can recollect, from Sir Maurice Hankey—stating to my great surprise that Field-Marshal Haig had changed his mind and did not now view the proposed extension as altogether unacceptable. I then intervened further to say (I will now quote the Minute) :—

*Nominal
approval given
for further
extension*

" Mr. Lloyd George said he understood that the Field-Marshal would now be prepared to accept the recommendations in Joint Note No. 10 [i.e., the recommendation for further extension] in principle subject to an agreement between himself and General Pétain as to the method of giving effect to it. The resolution therefore that was about to be moved must not be regarded as an order requiring immediate execution."

The actual Resolution that was passed in reference to this respect is recorded in the following terms :—

" Resolution in regard to the extension of the British Front. The Supreme War Council adopt Note 10 ; subject to the time and method of the extension of the British Line being left for arrangement between General Pétain and the Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig."

Haig and Pétain subsequently met and came to an understanding to take no further action for the time being on this troubled question.

These, therefore, are the actual facts as to what took place. I proposed that the difficulties which had arisen on the question of the extension of the British line should be solved by the sending of 11 Italian divisions to France in substitution for the British and French divisions on the Italian Front. The Italian Prime Minister warmly accepted the proposition and was prepared to recommend it to his military authorities. When the actual discussion of the proposals of the Supreme Council for extension came up for discussion I strongly supported Sir Douglas Haig's protest, and again urged the alternative of Italian troops. The Italian Prime Minister supported my protest, and again urged the idea of Italian troops. Sir Douglas Haig then, without any previous consultation with me, withdrew his objection and agreed with Pétain to take over further line in accordance with the recommendations of the Council. In actual

*Further
extension not
carried out*

fact, this extension which Haig agreed to in principle, even after my strong protest at his request and on his behalf, was not carried out, and the only result of his untimely intervention was that the proposal for making arrangements to bring 11 Italian divisions to France was dropped, and not revived until after the March offensive. The actual extension which took place was the one that Haig had himself agreed to with Pétain at Conferences where no member of the Government was present.

In view of these facts, of which there is official record in contemporary documents, it is rather hard that the whole of the responsibility should be placed on my shoulders and that it should be suggested that Haig was compelled by me to take over a line which he had not sufficient troops to defend.

I would specially draw attention here to the very misleading account of what took place as the result of the Versailles meeting which is given in the Official History of the War :—

*Misleading
account in
Official
History*

“ At the meeting which took place between Sir Douglas Haig and General Pétain on the 17th December the latter urged as reasons for the extension, that the British offensive operations had come to an end, and that there were fears of a German attack on his troops near Châlons and through Switzerland. Sir Douglas Haig represented that the British troops after the recent severe fighting required a period of rest, and that the strength of units, depleted by casualties, was not being replenished by drafts from England ; but nevertheless, he would relieve two divisions on the 10th January and endeavour to take over as far as the Oise by the end of the month ; but the precise date for the later relief could only be settled when the situation became clearer. This arrangement General Pétain accepted. However favourable the situation might become, he had no intention of making any ‘ main attack ’ before August, thus confirming his earlier statement to Sir Douglas Haig.

It was not until the 10th January, after an interval of over three weeks, that the Military Representatives at Versailles made their formal recommendation, without giving reasons, that the point of junction of the French and British Armies should be on the left bank of the Ailette, between that river and the Soissons-Laon road, about 17 miles from the Oise, but left the exact point to be

decided by the two Commanders-in-Chief, who eventually fixed it at $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles eastwards of the Oise."

This omits every reference to the objections I raised to any further extension of the line, and it creates an impression that as a result of what took place at Versailles, Haig had to make a further extension of his line, and that on a recommendation which was never formulated before January 10th. As a matter of fact, Haig never extended his line a single yard beyond the limit fixed in an agreement which he had entered into with Pétain on October 18th, 1917.

This paragraph is probably due to one of these oversights to which all historians are liable. Whoever wrote this misrepresentation must have had in front of him the actual Minutes of the Meeting.* The least I can say about the writer who, with such information at his disposal, penned such a distortion, is that he made a slovenly use of the documents at his disposal.

Was the extension of our line which took place in January justified? It is clear that the grounds for it were both military and political. On the political side it must be remembered that feeling in France had reached a state of irritation at what appeared to be a flagrantly unequal proportion of the front held by the British: this feeling, for which there was much warrant, was a fact that could not be ignored or argued away. In order to maintain good relations with our ally, and ease the tension of French public

*Actual
extension
justified*

* He rectifies it in a later page (p. 79) without calling attention to the previous misstatement.

opinion, worn down by the long and bitter sufferings of the War, it was essential that we should make some concession of this sort, unless it could be shown beyond peradventure that such action would inevitably entail disaster for the Allied Armies. The military considerations were just as strong. Prior to the extension, the British held less than 100 miles of front, the French more than 350 miles, although the British forces were two-thirds the size of the French. Even after the British had added these 28 miles to their front, they held about 125 miles to the French 325 miles of front. In view of the far greater density of the British forces, it would be ludicrous to suggest that this comparatively small addition to the line they held was from a military standpoint unsound, taking into consideration the requirements of the Allied Front in France as a whole. After all due weight has been given to other grounds alleged by Sir Douglas Haig for objecting to taking over this sector, the fact stands out that his main objection was because using part of his forces for this would render him less capable of resuming his Flanders offensive in the spring. He urged in this connection that the alternative to continuing the offensive was to let the initiative pass to the enemy. But since in any event he could not have resumed a Flanders offensive as early as March, because the state of the ground there would have rendered it impossible, the Germans still would have been free to take the initiative as they did, further south, in March, if Haig had kept a larger force at Passchendaele, and the St. Quentin sector had been still held by the attenuated French Army.

The extremely able Staff officers working at Versailles—and they included both Italian and

American experts—were in fact satisfied that on military grounds the British Army should have taken over, not less, but 12 miles more than they actually did. That was military advice. There was no politician on the body of experts who examined the question. This operation of taking over has often been alleged as one of the various causes which contributed to the German break-through on this front in March, 1918. That allegation cannot be justified on military grounds.

The British had far more ample resources for holding this sector strongly than the French. The trouble was that they did not distribute them wisely. This is a matter into which I shall have to enter more fully when I come to the dispositions made for the great battle which all knew was coming.

CHAPTER LXXVI

THE FALL OF ROBERTSON

THE decisions of Versailles on the formation of a General Reserve were designed to give the Allies for the first time the benefit conferred by a united front, first in defence and then in attack. The Germans had enjoyed that advantage on the Western Front right through the War and it had enabled them to hold long lines against armies which had a numerical superiority of 50 per cent. When they saw that the Nivelle offensive was impending and that they were to be attacked on a great scale by preponderant numbers, they constituted a strong reserve behind their lines, of divisions drawn partly from the sectors of the Western line from which they could be best spared, and partly from Roumania. Hence a defence which was so successful that it put the French Army out of action as a seriously offensive force for the rest of the year.

Had the Versailles project been put into operation a similar stunning rebuff would have been given to the German spring offensive after perhaps a slight preliminary success, and the German collapse would have come sooner and the British losses would not have been nearly so heavy. British and French divisions would have been drawn in time from parts

of the line where they were too thick on the ground, and as it became increasingly evident at what point the German attack was coming, the reserves would have moved into positions where they would have been readily available when the German attack developed. Divisions would also have been brought from Italy—either French, British or Italian. Arrangements might have been made for conveying British divisions from Palestine and substituting Indian divisions from Mesopotamia, where the Allies had a superiority of six to one. All this was done later on. But it was after the worst defeat that had befallen the British Army during the whole of the War.

After the Versailles meeting there began to ferment on our home front events which rapidly developed into a serious political crisis and for a few days threatened the life of the Ministry, and paralysed our efforts to deal firmly with the hesitancies of the Commander-in-Chief on the question of the General Reserve. The trouble arose from the machinations of that military clique which had thwarted every effort I had made during the War either to equip the Army, or to prevent a wasteful use being made of the enormous resources in men and material placed at their disposal, or to achieve that effective unity of front which alone could enable us to make a decisive use of the advantages we possessed in men, material, and command of the sea.

That the German General Staff depended upon the activities of this junta is demonstrated by one of the documents published by General Ludendorff after the War. In a memorandum which is marked "Very Secret" attention is called to the weaknesses of

the Alliance with which the Central Powers are confronted. One of them is thus described :—

“ Another disruptive element will be the *English Military Party* [the italics are theirs, not mine] which will come forward and try at last to get rid of the Lloyd George they loathe so heartily.”

We were about to witness a very determined effort—not the first nor the last—made by this party to form a cabal which would overthrow the existing War Cabinet and especially its Chief, and enthrone a Government which would be practically the nominee and menial of this military party. Exactly the same situation had arisen in Germany in July, 1916. The German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, determined to end the War, if he could, by a negotiated peace ; so Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and their military clique overthrew him, and from that point onwards took over the political direction of Germany. The causes of the German defeat were investigated by the Reichstag after the War, and many statesmen of the Central Powers have written on the subject. No one can doubt that the cause of Germany's defeat lay in the usurpation of political powers by the military leaders. Bismarck had had almost exactly the same trouble in 1870 and 1866, but, with a great effort, had checked this attempted usurpation. Bethmann-Hollweg could not : in fact, it was their political system that failed the Germans. The same attempt was made by a military clique here, but did not succeed. Our political system did not fail us.

General Pétain and Marshal Haig did not relish the idea of having their reserves commanded by Foch. Not only did it pass the control of the

forthcoming campaign into Foch's hands, but it removed divisions from their direct control in order

*Robertson's
anger at being
left off
Versailles
Committee*

to create such a Reserve. The hostility of the two Commanders-in-Chief, however, did not show itself immediately. Sir William Robertson, on the other hand, lost no time in taking action of a hostile character. When Sir Henry Wilson had first sketched out the project of the General Reserve to him he seemed quite enamoured of the idea, but in its original form the plan provided that the Controlling Board should consist of the three Chiefs of the General Staff, of whom Sir William Robertson would be one. That provision was dropped in the course of the discussions at Versailles because there were obvious practical objections to it. The General Reserve was intended to be brought into action in the event of a sudden emergency. Even before the emergency arose the intelligence received in the course of the coming weeks would involve a rearrangement in the location of the reserves. It is evident that neither the Italian nor the British Chiefs of the Staff could be present to take part in a decision until a great many fateful hours had passed. That is why it was imperative that the members of the Board should always be on the spot, ready for continuous consultation and decision without a moment's delay. As soon as the Supreme Council came to that conclusion, Sir William Robertson altered his attitude towards the whole scheme. A brilliant witness of the proceedings at Versailles writes :—

“ Robertson, not unnaturally, was furious. This was quite visible. Long after the Supreme War Council had risen, after passing this resolution,

and only a few secretaries being left in the room, Robertson still remained sitting alone in his place, motionless, his head resting on his hand, glaring silently in front of him.”*

The first intimation the Cabinet received of brewing trouble was at a meeting of the War Cabinet held immediately on my return from Versailles, at which I reported the decisions arrived at by the Supreme War Council, dwelling particularly upon the proposals in reference to the formation of the General Reserve. Lord Derby, who was accompanied to the meeting by Sir William Robertson, stated that he had not yet had sufficient time to study the reports submitted in regard to this question, and therefore must reserve judgment thereon. In reply I pointed out that as the matter had been decided unanimously by the Allied Representatives, and by myself and Lord Milner, who had been endowed by the War Cabinet with full authority to deal with this question on their behalf, I trusted that the matter would be considered by the Army Council in a most helpful spirit, and that there would be no delay in preparing the necessary Order in Council, if such were required, to give effect to their decision.

The first open shot was fired by the *Morning Post* in a telegram which it printed on February 8th from its “Military Correspondent in Paris,” and which ran as follows :—

Morning
Post telegram

“ Paris, 5th February.

The decisions of the recent Inter-Allied War Council regarding the control of British troops in

* Peter E. Wright : “ At the Supreme War Council,” p. 61.

the field are reported to be of such a strange character that Parliament should demand the fullest details and a Parliamentary Committee should examine them at once and take the opinions of our General Staff and of our Commanders in the field concerning the new arrangements."

There is no secret about the origin and the inspiration of this message. It was sent by Colonel Repington, who afterwards admitted his authorship and came out into the open under his own name with communications in the same vein. He was on intimate terms with Sir William Robertson, the C.I.G.S., and an active collaborator with the military clique which, as I have previously related, was intriguing with all the discontented elements in politics to overthrow the Government. Repington was the favoured confidant of the General Staff, whenever there were any criticisms that they wished to see directed against the War Cabinet and its policy. They supplied him with all the necessary material in the form of tit-bits of information, carefully selected, of course, and of a tendentious character. His diaries, where he records the interviews he had from time to time with Sir William Robertson and his principal coadjutor, the Director of Military Operations, Sir Frederick Maurice, and some mysterious person in the confidence of the War Office, who is referred to by Repington as "X," show how complete was his collaboration with the General Staff.

The communication from their Military Correspondent appeared in the *Morning Post* on February 8th, and the same evening the *Globe* reprinted what they

called the "disquieting telegram" published by their contemporary. They further proceeded to pass upon it comments which are full of significance having regard to what happened subsequently :—

*Comments of
the Globe*

" . . . It may be hoped that, as Mr. Asquith was responsible for entrusting the Higher Command to Sir Douglas Haig, as Commander-in-Chief in the field, and Sir William Robertson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in London—who both to a peculiar degree enjoy the confidence of the British Army and the British nation—he will not stand by and allow this arrangement to be broken up to gratify the whim of any individuals, however important. It may also be hoped that the House of Commons, which claims to be the seat of power, will refuse to allow itself to be elbowed out of its proper functions, and that at least we may be allowed to know what is going on behind the scenes, as no arrangement can make for military efficiency that precipitates a crisis in our Higher Command on the eve of a new campaign. Is there or is there not a Generalissimo ? ”

This article was sent to me by Lord Milner with the following covering letter :—

“ 17 Great College Street, S.W.,
8/2/18.

My dear Prime Minister,

You have no doubt seen the enclosed from the *Globe*.

I think the sooner we make a move the better. This kind of thing cannot be allowed to go on.

About Haig, I greatly doubt whether he would make common cause with only W.O. people against the Government. I think he is too loyal to lend himself to such proceedings.

*Milner's
protest*

On the other hand, I do think that he is likely to offer a resistance of his own to the proposal that he should allow any of his divisions to be placed in a General Reserve. He will use all the arguments with which we are so familiar, and he will never be convinced—as he is incapable of seeing any point of view but his own—that the creation of a General Reserve may end in giving him a much larger army than he has at present.

Now the creation of the General Reserve is the key of the whole business. It is not only clearly right in strategy, but it is the basis of our quite good understanding with the French.

It is no use having a great rumpus and getting rid of Robertson, if the policy is to be side-tracked, for quite different reasons, by Haig.

But Haig will, I believe, obey orders, if he once clearly understands that your mind is made up. And if he were to stick his toes in the ground, which I do not anticipate, it would be better to lose both Haig and Robertson than to continue at the mercy of both or either of them. The situation is much too critical for that and no time should be lost. The Army would be quite happy, if the worst came to the worst, with Plumer and Harrington vice Haig and Bertie Lawrence, and would not then so much care who was the C.I.G.S. Du Cane, in fact, would fill the bill.

'Plumer as C.-in-C.' a brigadier fresh from the field said to me the other day, 'would be worth ten extra divisions.' Extravagant, of course. I merely quote as showing that any change which brought Plumer more to the front would be popular.

I don't *want* this, I like the plan you sketched this morning. My only point is that, *if* Haig were intractable, I believe we could still deal with the situation. The one vital thing is, since there must be a change, that we should be able once for all to get free to do what we know to be right.

Yours very sincerely,

MILNER."

As it turned out, the letter underestimated the formidable difficulties to be encountered here and in France when it came to overruling the opposition of the military chiefs. In order to ease matters I proposed that Robertson should be our representative on the Board of Control. This involved his vacating the position of C.I.G.S. In that event it was proposed that Sir Henry Wilson should be appointed to that post.

Sir Douglas Haig came over on the 9th and I had an interview with him and the Secretary of State for War on the situation. I wrote
My interview with Haig Milner the following letter which gives my impressions of that interview at the time :—

"9th February, 1918.

My dear Milner,

I have had an afternoon of it with Haig and Derby. Haig was quite reasonable. He did not

quite like H. W. coming here, and thought the Army might be very shocked ; but he said that was a matter for the Government. In fact, his attitude was perfectly correct. Derby, Haig and Macpherson thought that to make Robertson Deputy would be to humiliate him, and they thought it quite unnecessary in view of the fact that Wilson was made the Chief Adviser of the Government. Subject to that, the document was signed by Derby, and he is to see the King later on about it.

Wully is to be told to-morrow by Macpherson, who is motoring over to Eastbourne to communicate the news to him. Derby is delighted with our change of plans ; and as we had only the choice of three or four doubtful second bests, I am firmly convinced that this is the best of them.

Ever sincerely,

D. LLOYD GEORGE."

But although at that date Haig seems to have professed his readiness to stand honourably by the Versailles agreement to which he was a party, Robertson was not in the least propitiated. The *Globe* article was a clear indication that a formidable conspiracy was being worked up and that forces had already been gathered with a view to making a serious political attack on the Government in Parliament. Robertson and his friends meant this time to fight to a finish, and they had every hope of being able to build up a Parliamentary combination drawn from all parties which would reverse the Versailles decision, supplant the Government, and substitute for it one which would make Robertson

virtual dictator for the rest of the War, as Hindenburg was in Germany and by the same means.

The next step of this clique, in its reckless disregard of the interests of the nation in a Great War, transcends anything for which—
Morning Post article fortunately—there is any precedent in any war ever waged by this country.

The conspirators decided to publish the war plans of the Allies for the coming German offensive. Let it be borne in mind that these war plans were not amateur schemes sketched out by presumptuous politicians and forced on unwilling and horrified soldiers. They were prepared by a body of able and experienced Generals—one of them acknowledged to be far and away the greatest military brain and leader thrown up by the Allies. There was no politician present at the meetings of the military members of the Supreme War Council which initiated and worked out these plans. They were then further considered and discussed at a gathering where the two Commanders-in-Chief and Sir William Robertson were present, and there they were adopted unanimously. Haig and Pétain were there and never dissented. On the 11th February there appeared in the *Morning Post* a long article signed by Colonel Repington in which the proposal to set up a General Reserve under the command of General Foch was completely revealed to friend and foe alike. The article was headed :—

“ THE WAR COUNCIL.

PARIS DISCUSSIONS.

REMARKABLE REPORTS.”

It began by asseverating that :—

“ . . . Prime Ministers and others have recently resolved themselves into a Council of War, have rivalled it in strategy, and have exclusively occupied themselves in teaching soldiers how and where to make war.”

As I have already pointed out, I was not present at the meetings of the Military Representatives of the Supreme War Council where these plans in the first instance were formulated, nor was any civilian representative there. Foch would be the last man to submit to any dictation on questions of strategy from any one, and certainly not from any civilian. He stood up to the redoubtable Clemenceau, who was his civilian chief, and that needed some courage.

But the essence of the article comes when under the heading of “ A New Decision ” Colonel Repington disclosed the military plan for countering the impending German attack. This is how he defends his treachery :—

“ . . . Newspapers have been strictly enjoined not to refer to one of the chief results of the Council. In this way it is hoped that criticism will be burked. But there are times when we must take our courage in both hands and risk consequences. One of the decisions taken is against all sound principles and can only breed confusion in a defensive campaign such as that to which we are restricted at present. . . .”

He then proceeds to give away the whole scheme :

the Reserve of manoeuvre—its functions—the body set up to control it—the name of the President ; and he emphasises the salient feature of the project, that it is to be independent of the two Commanders-in-Chief. There is a passage which shows that the inspiring motive of this malignant and treasonable article was not so much hatred of any particular politician—although Milner and I came in for special denunciation—but jealousy of authority conferred upon another set of Generals held up to contempt as “ the Versailles soldiers.”

“ . . . At present it is the duty of the Commander of the General Staff to issue the orders of the War Cabinet to the Armies. But now there interposes the Versailles soldiers, under the Presidency of General Foch, and the British General on this body is not apparently under the War Office, nor was he appointed by them. He owes his elevation to Mr. Lloyd George’s favour alone. . . .”

The head and front of the “ Versailles soldiers ” was Foch, the greatest soldier of the War, and General Weygand, one of the ablest Staff officers produced by the War. With all respect for Sir William Robertson’s admirable qualifications, he had not commanded in any of the battles fought in the War. In fact he had never been in action. His right-hand man and the architect of his downfall, Sir Frederick Maurice, was as comfortably placed as any politician in a Department at the War Office when the worst fighting of the War by the British Army began, and there he remained up to the hour of his dismissal. This invaluable piece of information as to the Allied plan

of campaign was passed on to the Germans by partisans in a quarrel between rival Generals.

Repington, having exposed his real aim and motive, then incited the Army Council to an act of insubordination against the Government :—

A call

to revolt

“ . . . The Army Council will, I hope, make a firm and united stand in the interests of the rest of the Army, and will make the position perfectly clear. Everybody has to go ‘over the top’ sooner or later in this War, and it may now be the Army Council’s turn.”

Which of the men on the Army Council had ever been “over the top” in this War? The article ends by saying that “this is the situation which Parliament must clear up in such a manner as it thinks best.” The Army having given the cue by rebelling against authority, Parliament was then “to do its bit.”

Repington did not only disclose to the enemy the existence of the General Reserve, and its mechanism, but the entire plans of the Allies for the year. They were embodied in Resolutions which provided that the Allies would stand on the defensive in France, and resist the German attack with the scheme of the General Reserve, and that Allenby should take the offensive in Palestine. Repington’s article does not disclose in a general way the discussions of the Supreme War Council and its decisions ; he speaks with minute precision. He quotes from the very English text of the Minutes of the proceedings : he uses my own words as recorded then, “the delivery of a knock-out blow to Turkey.” We had discussed Allenby’s difficulty, and this discussion is in the

Minutes. The words of the Minutes reappear in the *Morning Post* article : " how long will it take for our broad-gauge railway " to advance ? No one could doubt that Repington had seen the text of the Minutes of the proceedings of the Supreme War Council, and (it will be noted) the English text. In fact, Repington admits it : on February 4th, 1918, being in Paris, he wrote in his diary :—

" This morning there is published an official and completely fantastic *compte rendu* of the proceedings of the War Council. . . . It tells absolutely nothing of the decisions taken."

He could not know this (which was, of course, true) unless he had seen the text of the Minutes and of the Resolutions.

I know nothing comparable to this betrayal in the whole of our history. It was immediately appreciated in Germany. The *Morning Post* article appeared on 11th February ; Professor Delbrück, the famous German authority on military and strategic questions, expressed his thanks for it in the issue of his magazine* of February 24th. He worked in close connection with the General Staff, and the information was evidently conveyed to him by their Intelligence Section.

Repington's betrayal might, and ought to have, decided the War. Professor Delbrück was one of the chief witnesses before the Commission of the Reichstag which later was to investigate the causes of the catastrophe of 1918 and his views, set out in writing, were virtually adopted by the Commission. These views are to be found at rather greater length in a

* The *Preussische Jahrbuch*.

book of his.* He pays me the compliment of saying that my plan for the Allies—a defensive in France and an offensive side-show elsewhere, would also have been the best plan for Germany to pursue, and, in terms, states that “Lloyd George, the civilian, appreciated the military experiences of the first four years better than Ludendorff.”† Repington’s disclosures, as he points out, enabled the German High Command to execute such a plan in perfect security. For it informed the German High Command that the Allies were not to take the offensive in France, and so enabled German divisions to be moved elsewhere from France without any risk. Delbrück was a Nationalist in politics and highly patriotic : great as were Repington’s services to Germany, yet Delbruck is shocked by its perfidy, and applies the word “treason” (*Landesverrat*) to it.‡

This extraordinary effusion was given prominence in the columns of the *Morning Post* and the benediction of a leading article. Had it appeared in the *Daily Herald* or the *Forward* or any other Socialist journal, we should have been constantly reminded in every political conflict waged since, how the Socialists betrayed secret information of great military value to the enemy at the most critical stage of the War.

Entries in the Repington Diaries show that this was not an indiscretion due to the impulse of an individual but that it was the first move in a concerted attack on a very wide front.

*Derby refuses
to join
the rebels*

* “Ludendorff’s Selbstporträt.”

† Ibid., p. 52.

‡ Ibid., p. 55.

Here is an extract :—

“Saturday, 9th February. Met Gwynne at the Bath Club. We compared notes and experiences. After I had told him what I had learned, he told me that there was a big row on here, and that he hoped the Army Council were all going to stand firm. Asquith has stated that he will speak on the debate on the Address next Tuesday, and Gwynne and I agreed that I should write and expose the Paris proceedings either Monday or Tuesday. Gwynne is going to see Derby and try to hearten him up, and is all for fighting this matter out.”

Great pressure from many quarters was brought to bear on Lord Derby to join the conspirators. They were under the impression that they had captured his sympathies and they were profoundly disappointed when subsequently he failed to follow their fortunes. I am convinced that they were not justified in relying upon his co-operation. There was soon evidence that the ramifications were not confined to one party. A body calling itself the Unionist War Committee in the Commons “passed strong resolutions warmly condemning the attacks on the Generals.” These resolutions were brought to me by Lord Salisbury. I challenged him to point to one attack which I had made or encouraged on the Generals. Whatever I might think of them personally, I knew the importance of not undermining public confidence in them as long as they held their positions. The moment the Army lost their belief in their leaders they could not be expected any longer to face the horrors of the battlefield or to endure the chronic discomfort of the

trenches. The mutiny in the French Army had taught us what might be expected from troops that had ceased to trust their Generals. At home I knew that such a feeling would spread the unrest. I therefore went so far as to take no steps to correct the impression of resounding victories created by false or incomplete reports from the front and in all my public utterances I referred in eulogistic terms to Haig personally. My only public criticism was directed to the lack of co-ordination between the Allied Armies. It is one of the greatest difficulties encountered by statesmen who have the supreme responsibility of directing the resources of a country in a war and are held accountable to public opinion for failure, that they cannot always openly state the facts as they know them until the conflict is over. And the necessity of pouring glowing panegyrics on Generals who did not merit the praise lavished on them, made it less easy—indeed almost impossible—to correct their calamitous errors. All this I pointed out to my critics at this time. But nothing availed. The train had been laid and I knew that when Parliament met it would be fired. The powder for the assailants was supplied from the War Office.

The treachery of the *Morning Post* was considered at a meeting of the Cabinet held on the day of the publication. The War Cabinet recognised that :—

*Cabinet
discusses*

*Morning
Post article*

“ The article appeared to give valuable military information to the enemy, and constituted a definite breach of Regulation 18 of the Defence of the Realm Regulations, and also a defiance of the decision of the War Cabinet, as to the

undesirability of any reference being made in British newspapers regarding the formation or command of a General Inter-Allied Reserve."

As a proof that Lord Derby was not implicated in these intrigues, I have a note taken at the time which showed that he denounced the article in question as clearly of a most mischievous character. He believed that it had been written from Paris, and said that it was clear that Colonel Repington had become acquainted with information of a secret and confidential character which had now been made public by the Editor of the *Morning Post*. Whether the plans were improperly revealed to Repington in London or Paris, they ought never to have been made public.

The Director of Military Intelligence stated that he had understood the article in question had been submitted to the Press Bureau on the previous evening. The Press Bureau had communicated with him, and Sir Edward Cook had informed him that he had told the Editor that the article infringed Regulation 18 under the Defence of the Realm Act, and ignored the special request issued to the Press on the 4th February.*

Sir Edward Cook read to the War Cabinet portions of the article in its original form as first submitted to the Press Bureau. He said he had endeavoured to censor it, but its whole character was such that amendment was practically impossible. He had accordingly returned it to Mr. Gwynne with a letter conveying the warning above described. In spite of this fact, the article had appeared in a slightly amended form.

* Press Bureau, Serial D.621.

I pointed out that this was not the first occasion on which Colonel Repington had written articles for publication which were of the utmost value to the enemy. Further, in connection with the Cabinet inquiries regarding the man-power situation, Colonel Repington had written articles, published by the *Morning Post*, containing figures regarding our strength and reserves. In fact Repington in his diaries boasts of these feats: he writes on January 24th, 1918: "My article exposing the failure of the War Cabinet to maintain the Army came out in the *Morning Post* to-day without going to the Press Bureau and caused much excitement." Also an article damaging to British interests had been sent by him for publication in America.

It was decided to consult the Solicitor-General and the Director of Public Prosecutions. In the subsequent discussion, the Solicitor-General called attention to the fact that the Supreme Council at Versailles had on the 6th February passed a Resolution on the subject of the danger of Press revelations of the plans adopted at the recent Meeting. This Resolution said :—

"The Military Representatives wish respectfully to draw the attention of the Governments represented on the Supreme War Council to the undesirability for military reasons, of any public discussion in the Press or otherwise of the arrangements now being taken in hand for the creation and employment of an Inter-Allied General Reserve."

It was urged that unless action was taken in a case such as this against a wealthy and prominent London

newspaper, it would be quite impossible to take proceedings if necessary against smaller Labour newspapers in future.

The difficulty we experienced was in framing the charge in such a way as to make it impossible to give further publicity to the actual plans agreed upon at Versailles. Any implication that the article contained a disclosure of the real character of the Versailles scheme would in itself aggravate the mischief. The charge had therefore to be confined to a breach of one of the Regulations of the Defence of the Realm. The culprits thus escaped with a fine.

*Culprits
condemned
and fined*

Repington published with pride a letter he received after his conviction from Sir William Robertson, in the course of which this General Officer, who but recently held the most exalted office in the British Army, writes to a person who has been convicted of publishing the secret plans of the Allied Armies, condoling with him on the greatness of his sacrifice, and assures him that they had both done what was best for the country. No wonder he adds, "I am heartily sick of the whole sordid business of the past month"—Sordid indeed!

It did not end with the publication of the details of the Allied military plans in the Press. A concerted effort was made to secure even more details and fuller and more authentic publicity in Parliament. No prosecution would lie against a Minister who was forced by Parliamentary pressure to furnish information.

*Debate in
Parliament*

Parliament met on the 12th February. It had been conveyed to me that Asquith as Leader of the Opposition would interrogate me as to recent events. But

I was unable to ascertain through the recognised channels of communication what questions were to be put to me, although I endeavoured to do so. I was told that Asquith was out of town and would not be back before the meeting of the House. I mention this fact because something turns on it. I informed his Deputy, Mr. Reginald M'Kenna, that I was prepared to give Mr. Asquith personally and privately the information he sought as to the Versailles decisions but that I could not do so in public for obvious reasons. I received no reply to this communication. Mr. Asquith made no allusion to it in his speech and proceeded to demand a public revelation of what had occurred in reference to the Reserves. I had therefore to inform the House of the offer I had made.

Asquith, with the skill of the practised debater, opened the attack with a glowing eulogy on the "two great soldiers," Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson. "There are no two men in the whole of Europe whose military judgment I would more unhesitatingly accept." The fight against the Government was to be presented in the form of an issue between Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson on the one hand and myself on the other. It was a dexterous move. He meant to use the popularity of these two distinguished soldiers as a weapon with which to slay the Government. He then proceeded to cross-examine me as to the Versailles decision. He disclaimed any desire to seek information as to the result of the deliberations of the Conference so far as they related to military and strategic operations. But he wanted to know in what respect the Allied Governments had departed from their promise not

*Asquith's
attack*

to confer any executive authority on the Supreme Council, and what were the new functions and new duties undertaken by the Council. This is exactly what I proposed to give him in private had he responded to my invitation. But it must have been obvious to him—for he must have been fully informed on the subject by the General Staff with whom he was in touch—that I could not reveal the executive functions given to the Board without also disclosing the strategic purpose we had in view of the creation of a General Reserve and the way in which it would work in the battle. And I could not give information to the House as to the extent to which our decision affected the powers either of the Chief of the General Staff or the Commander-in-Chief without entering fully into details as to the working of our plan and the constitution of the Board that would exercise the control.

At the time I was suffering from a severe cold with a temperature, but I felt that only one who had attended the deliberations of the Allied statesmen and Generals could deal with the situation. I replied to Asquith :—

My reply

“ My Rt. Hon. friend asked me a question with regard to the Versailles Conference, and he seemed to think that it was possible to answer without giving away any information as to the conduct of our actual military operations. There is no use giving partial information, and I think that if he reflects—even from the indications which he has seen as to the character of the decisions there—he will find that it is impossible to make any statement to the House as to the decisions which were taken

without giving information as to the plans of the Allies. . . .”

I pointed out how the situation had changed since November owing to the certainty that Russia had withdrawn from the War and that, in spite of pledges given by her to the contrary to the Russians, Germany was withdrawing troops from that frontier in order to attack us in the West :—

“ That was the situation with which we were confronted at Versailles. Up to this year, there was no attack which the Germans could bring to bear upon either our Army or the French Army which could not, in the main, be dealt with by the reserves of each individual Army. The situation is completely changed by the enormous reinforcements brought from the East to the West ; and the Allied representatives at Versailles had to consider the best method of dealing with the situation, which was a completely different one from any situation with which they had been previously confronted. They had to deal with a situation where it may be necessary—where it is absolutely essential—that the whole strength of the Allied Armies—France, Great Britain, Italy and America—should be made available for the point at which the attack comes. Where will the blow come ? Will it come here or there ? Who can tell ? All you know is that it is preparing. They have got a gigantic railway system behind which they may swing troops here or there. It is essential that arrangements should be made by which the Allies shall treat their Armies as one, to meet the danger and menace wherever it comes.

That was the problem with which we were confronted at Versailles. If we had not dealt with it, we should have been guilty of a gross dereliction of duty. What happened there? In the old Conferences to which I have been accustomed military members met together, and when the civilian members met, the military members came with a written document saying what they had decided. I do not mind saying that at such a Conference, to discuss strategy was a pure farce. But here you had, for purposes of decisions, civilian members and military members sitting together for four or five days. The Commanders-in-Chief were there, the Chiefs of the Staffs, the military representatives of the Supreme Council and the Prime Ministers of the three countries, and other Ministers as well. The military members took part just as freely as the civilian members in the discussions, and there was an interchange of views during the whole of the time. And let me say that, as the result, complete unanimity was reached. There was not a division of opinion upon any resolution that was ultimately come to."

I then referred to the Repington disclosures :—

"With regard to this critical action which is involved in the extension of the Versailles powers, I must speak with caution, because I am talking about military decisions in the War Council. I wish there had been someone in Germany, or in Austria, whose ears were glued to the keyhole, when the War Council of Austria and Germany sat, and that he had published their decisions in the

*Danger of
betraying
valuable
information*

newspapers ! The man who had done that and could tell us what arrangements the Austrians and the Germans had together come to, in order to co-ordinate most effectually their plans to attack our forces, would be worth many army corps to the Allies.

When I talk about the War Council and its decisions I have to do so with caution, because if information is given to the enemy, I had rather the responsibility were on other shoulders than mine. . . . There are millions of gallant lives depending upon it, the honour of the State, the safety of our native land depends upon it—these great war aims, upon which the future of the world depends, turn upon it. To give away information which would imperil these is treason beyond description, and I decline to participate in it. It is enough for me to say that the decisions come to there were come to unanimously. We have to consider the best methods of carrying them out.”

I begged Asquith :—

“ . . . not to press the Government to give information which any intelligence officer on the other side would gladly pay large sums of money to get, as to the arrangements which this country and the Allies have made for countering that great blow.”

Mr. Asquith resented the implication that he was asking for information of that kind. I replied that I felt certain he had no wish to do so, but that I wanted him to realise that if I were to give the information to the House it would also be giving it to the enemy. I reminded him that I had offered

to convey to him personally in confidence the whole of the Versailles decisions. I continued :—

“ . . . When you are conducting a war, there are questions which a Government must decide. The House of Commons, if it is not satisfied, has in my judgment but one way of dealing with the situation ; it can change that Government. But to try and discuss military decisions—

MR. ASQUITH : I made no such request.

THE PRIME MINISTER : Believe me, this is a military decision. Does my right hon. friend know what it means ? I say it is a military decision—a military decision of the first magnitude—and a military decision where some of the greatest soldiers of the Allies were present and to which they contributed.

MR. G. LAMBERT : Did Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson approve these decisions ?

THE PRIME MINISTER : Certainly ; they were present there, and all those representatives approved. I could carry it further

*Appeal for
confidence*

with regard to that. (HON. MEMBERS : No, No ! and an HON. MEMBER :

‘ Do not be drawn ! ’) It is very difficult under these circumstances, because the House must realise that I am anxious not to give information which would be of the slightest help to the enemy. There is only one way when we go to councils of war—you must leave it to those who are there to decide, and if you have no confidence in them, whether they be military or whether they be civil, there is only one way, and that is to change them. But to go on and discuss these matters in the newspapers, whether on one side or the other—

and if you begin discussing them on one side you are bound to have discussion on the other—makes war direction impossible—absolutely impossible ! ”

In conclusion I made an appeal to the House and to the Press :—

“ . . . I have been fighting hard against these paragraphs appearing in the Press. There is nothing that makes the work of government more difficult than discussions of strategical questions going on in the Press, and I appeal to the House of Commons, and I appeal outside the House of Commons to those who are interested in seeing this War conducted efficiently, to prevent discussions of this kind going on. If the House of Commons and the country are not satisfied with the conduct of the War, and if they think there is any Government which can conduct it better, then it is their business, in God’s name, to put that other Government in ! But as long as the House of Commons retains its confidence in the Government, then I say it ought to allow the Government a full and free hand in the direction of the War.”

For all practical purposes this concluded the debate. The House was clearly satisfied with the explanation given.

I was hopeful that after the full discussion in the House and the failure of the opposition to make any case that stirred sentiment either in or out of the House against the Versailles decisions, Sir William Robertson would see the wisdom of reconciling himself to the situation. I was anxious not to complicate

*Problem of
Robertson's
attitude*

matters by dismissing Generals. Robertson had won confidence as an administrator which was fully justified both by his organisation as Quartermaster-General in France and by the way he pulled things together at the War Office. But he also had built up for himself a reputation as a great strategist which was not justified by any achievement in the studies of peace-time or in the active planning of war-time. He had thus acquired a fame in the popular estimation far beyond anything his record would warrant. There had been much praise but no criticism. In war open detraction of Generals is deprecated—on the other hand, laudation, however extravagant, is encouraged. This method gives confidence to the Army at the front and to the public at home. Any public suggestion that the Army leaders are unfit or untrustworthy would demoralise the troops. This necessity places statesmen at a considerable disadvantage in their dealings with the military chiefs. I could not have published my memorandum on Passchendaele or pointed out how its predictions had been fulfilled. Had I over-ridden him without publishing my full reasons I should have been told I was interfering in matters for which I was not qualified by experience or training to express an opinion, and that I was setting aside the judgment of men to whom I and others had induced millions to entrust their lives. In France, in Germany, in Italy, in Russia, as well as in our own country, it had been a source of almost insuperable difficulty in securing the best leadership for the Army. In Germany, where Generals could point to a dazzling array of great victories in every battlefield, they acquired such authority that they dominated the Government in matters exclusively

within the sphere of Ministers. In France, Joffre almost achieved that influence during the first years of the War. No doubt Robertson had been persuaded by the sycophants, whom great power without criticism always breeds, that he could establish a similar dictatorship in this country, and that this was his opportunity. He made up his mind to challenge a definite conclusion with the War Cabinet. He was convinced that the Government had lost whatever popularity it had ever acquired—that the nation would welcome a change—that there were forces in Parliament, drawn from every Party, strong enough to effect a coup—and that the issue between generals and politicians was well chosen. Robertson therefore dug in his stubborn toes. He refused the offer of a position on the Board of Control if it involved his surrender of the position of C.I.G.S. He insisted that the Chief of the Staff should be *ex officio* member with power to appoint a deputy when he was unable to attend.

I was determined that the military representative at Versailles should not be a mere mouthpiece or instrument of the Chief of the Staff, just a deputy who could not go beyond limited instructions sent him from England by a chief who had not heard the argument or even the proposals to be debated. That would have been a farce. Robertson would have probably sent there the subservient and rather unbalanced Frederick Maurice, one of those foolish devotees who bring the idols they worship to their downfall. This intention is recorded in Wilson's Diaries.* Maurice would have done just what he was told and no more. He did not possess the independence or the judgment

* Major-General Caldwell : " Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson," Vol. II, p. 22.

which would have given to his chief the impartial information and good counsel which would have enabled him to form a sound opinion. From any point of view there could not have been a poorer choice. The Cabinet therefore presented Robertson with the alternative of either going there himself or remaining as C.I.G.S. at the War Office. In either case we made it clear that the Versailles nominee must meet his Allied coadjutors on equal terms and therefore must be free and unfettered. Robertson refused the nomination and challenged the whole Versailles decision.

During these critical days the chill I had contracted laid me up and I was unable to attend the Cabinet. I saw my colleagues in my room, especially Mr. Bonar Law, Lord Milner and Mr. Balfour. The last was reluctant to let Robertson go, and felt certain that a good deal of his attitude was due to pique and a thorough dislike of Sir Henry Wilson, whom he suspected to be the alternative nomination. I told Balfour that if he could persuade Robertson to be reasonable I had no desire to have a rupture with him. He promised to interview him. Here is his account of the conversation, which he sent me at the time :—

“ Foreign Office,
15th February, 1918.
NOTES OF A CONVERSATION WHICH I HAD
WITH THE C.I.G.S. ON THURSDAY,
14TH FEBRUARY, 1918, AT 3.30 P.M.

By request of the Cabinet, I went to see General Robertson yesterday afternoon, in order if possible

to persuade him either to retain the position of Chief of the Staff on its traditional lines ; or, if he preferred it, to take the post of Military Member of the Allied War Council at Versailles.

I pointed out to him that the Government gave him the alternative of accepting either of the two great Staff appointments connected with the conduct of the War on the Western Front. It seemed to me that they could do no more, and that, on public grounds, he ought to accept.

General Robertson observed, repeatedly and with great insistence, that the fact of his having been offered whichever of the two posts he preferred had, in his view, nothing to do with the question. If his objection had merely been that the powers now given to the Council at Versailles, and therefore to the British Member of it, overshadowed the position of the C.I.G.S., it might have conceivably been worth while to transfer his activities from London to Versailles. But this was not his point of view at all. He objected to the new system,* and he equally objected to it whether he was expected to take a share in working it as C.I.G.S. or to take a share in working it as Military Member of the Supreme War Council. An objectionable object in the middle of a table (to use his own metaphor) was equally objectionable from whichever end of the table you looked at it.

I did my best to persuade him that the responsibility of refusing a great position at the most critical moment of the War was one which he was hardly justified in taking. Extreme cases might be conceived, in which the machine to be

* He had approved of it in his speech at Versailles, vide p. 2735.

worked was so obviously fated to break down that no man could be required to undertake the duty of working it. But it seemed to me impossible to say this of the present plan. Doubtless every scheme for introducing some measure of unity into the working of four different armies, under four different Commanders-in-Chief and four different General Staffs, belonging to four different nations, was open to objection, and holes could easily be picked in it. The Germans had, and must continue to have, an advantage over the Allies in the matter of unity of command. But it seemed to me, though I had nothing to do with the contrivance of the Versailles plan, that, with a little goodwill, it could be made to work smoothly and efficiently; and that, if this were so, I thought he should consider it his duty to work the plan.

We discussed the matter on these lines for over half an hour; I regret to say with no result at all.

General Robertson was very anxious that the scheme should be so modified that the Military Member at Versailles should be the subordinate and representative of the C.I.G.S. In that case he would be quite ready either to retain the position of Chief of the Staff or go to Versailles.

I had, however, no commission from the Cabinet to discuss a scheme which had, I gathered, already been rejected at the late Conference, nor indeed was I qualified to do so.

A. J. B."

On that Memorandum it was evident to the Cabinet

that they were up against a graver issue even than the one raised by the Versailles decision.

*Threat of
military
dictation*

It was now a question whether the Government of the day should submit to military dictation on a matter where they were by every constitutional precedent the supreme authority. The Inter-Allied Governments, including ours, were all represented at Versailles: their principal military advisers were also present. The decision taken there received the unanimous assent of both the civilian and military representatives of all the Allied nations. Even if the British Government had desired to alter the decision, they could not have done so without reopening the question with their Allies. A debate had taken place in Parliament on this very issue and the action of the Government was not challenged in the Division Lobby. Now an eminent and highly placed soldier, who was present at the Versailles Conference and acquiesced in the plan, took upon himself the responsibility of brushing it on one side. If the Government surrendered, then a military dictatorship would have been an accomplished fact. The Government of the day would have been as impotent in the face of protests or vetoes or orders issued by Robertson here as the German Chancellor and his Ministers had become after July, 1916, when confronted by the peremptory messages of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. We were bound to take a stand at the risk of much misunderstanding and the chance of a Parliamentary defeat. The War Cabinet were unanimous. There were, however, influential Ministers outside the Cabinet who gave trouble, and at least two threatened to resign. One of them—and he was by no means the least influential—actually placed his resignation in my

hands. The situation for the moment seemed precarious. Nevertheless, we determined to stand or fall by the Versailles decision.

When Robertson refused to continue as C.I.G.S. on the terms we offered, he in effect resigned. The

Choosing Robertson's successor : The obvious person for the post was Sir Henry Wilson. But like all men of brilliant gifts and marked personality he

had not only fervent admirers but implacable opponents—in the Army. Professional officers were sharply divided into these two schools. The men at the top were strongly anti-Wilson. Some actively disliked him : most of them distrusted him. Both schools were right. He possessed intellectual gifts which justified admiration. But he also had attributes which explained and, to a large extent, gave warrant for the suspicion and lack of confidence so widely felt in him. He was whimsical almost to the point of buffoonery. He answered a serious question or expounded a grave problem in a vein of facetious and droll frivolity which was undignified in a man of his grave responsibilities. Habitually he jested over questions of life and death. This habit detracted from the weight and authority which his position and capacity ought to have given to his counsel. He had undoubtedly the nimblest intelligence amongst the soldiers of high degree. He had also a lucidity of mind and therefore of expression which was given to none of his professional rivals. It was a delight to hear him unravel and expound a military problem. For that reason he was specially helpful in a council of civilians. But he had no power of decision. That is why he failed in the field. For the same



Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson

reason he was not a complete success in council. He shrank from the responsibility of the final word, even in advice. I was always perplexed to know what to think of him. His friends had an extravagant opinion of his ability. They credited him with genius of a high order. I had been taught to suspect him, not only for political reasons. I was conscious of their prejudices and of their origin and was thus on guard against them. For that reason I discounted too much all my instinctive doubts about him. I always felt that the views of politicians about his merits or demerits had no reference to his military qualifications. They were formed from motives of political association and were therefore not impartial. Asquith hated him for his implication in the Curragh mutiny. For the same reason he was an undoubted favourite with Bonar Law, Milner and Carson. But neither Asquith nor the Unionist leaders judged him fairly as a soldier. They were much too prejudiced either for him or against him on partisan grounds. I did my best always during the War to discard political bias in my choice of men for service in any capacity. I did not think Wilson the ideal man for the post, but he was much the best brain I had met in the upper ranks of our professional army and he did this country a memorable service : from the beginning he appreciated the genius of Foch, which was by no means perceived even by the French General Staff. His was the only military mind—French or English—subtle enough to understand the super-subtlety of Foch's genius.

However, I realised that the fact of this highly controverted and controverting personality being in the background of the discussion complicated the issue. Wilson was the living embodiment of the

Versailles idea. He was partly responsible for it. This was generally known. For that reason a large number of Liberals whom in ordinary circumstances I could have relied upon to fight against military dictatorship in any shape or form swung right behind the military clique. And so did the Irish. What an ironical situation ! The Liberals, who in 1914 fought an attempt at a military overlordship engineered by Wilson, now, because of their hatred of his intrigue, backed up a more dangerous conspiracy to establish a military dictator. On the other hand, the instigator and organiser of the effort of the soldiers in 1914 to override Parliament had become, only four years later, the champion and the standard bearer of the resistance of the Government of the day to a similar conspiracy. But I have seen these paradoxical situations so often in politics that they have long ago ceased to surprise me.

I am bound, however, to acknowledge that the friendship, amounting to affection, with which Wilson was regarded by powerful members of the War Cabinet helped to win their
*Wilson's
friends in
the Cabinet* adhesion to the change at the War Office. Balfour, Derby and Robert Cecil were not of the number. They inclined the other way. But with Balfour, his interview with Robertson settled him. The other two were still recalcitrant, or rather one was hesitant and the other definitely captious. In the circumstances I thought it desirable to offer the post of C.I.G.S. to a soldier who commanded the respect and confidence of the whole Army without distinction of rank and of the nation without reference to party. I therefore first of all offered it to Plumer, who was then in command of the British Army on the Italian Front. I had con-

sulted Haldane, who knew the Army well, and he had warned me against Plumer. He was fully alive to his fighting qualities, but thought little of his intelligence. He considered him quite unfitted for the duties of Chief of the Staff. Plumer, however, settled the matter by declining the post. He made it clear that his sympathies were with Robertson. I am not sure whether he decided on merits or out of personal loyalty. The Cabinet, therefore, fell back on Wilson. There was no other obvious alternative.

Haig and Derby came over on Sunday, the 17th February, to see me at my cottage at Walton Heath.

Discussion with Derby and Haig We discussed the whole position for hours. Haig put up no fight for Robertson. He clearly did not approve of his defiance of a decision come to by the Government. I thought it right to inform him that Derby had placed his resignation in my hands. I was under the impression that he had a great regard and respect for his civilian chief. I was anxious to find out at once whether that would affect his attitude. I was surprised to discover that, so far from the news disturbing him, he sniffed it aside with an expression of contempt. He had a poor opinion of Derby's stalwartness, and did not hesitate to show it. Haig himself had no intention of resigning and gave no indication that he was not prepared to accept the Versailles decision. He pointed out that as it was now becoming evident that the German attack would be on the British Front it would not be possible to take any of his reserves away from that front. I assured him that I felt confident Foch was fully aware of that fact and would not contemplate the folly of sending away

troops to a sector which was not threatened. He expressed himself as being quite satisfied with that assurance. He never then objected to the plan by which the General Reserve would be placed under the command of Foch. Wilson saw Haig that evening at his house at Kingston and Haig told him that : " All these quarrels had nothing to do with him, and that he was prepared to accept whatever was decided by the Cabinet, and then play up all he could."

When Haig left me, Derby remained behind to place his resignation in my hands for the third time during the past 24 hours. This time he insisted that it was irrevocable. He explained that he did not do so because of any disagreement with the line taken by the Cabinet, but out of loyalty to the men with whom he had worked at the War Office. And he told me his decision was final. As soon, therefore, as he left I got on the telephone to Bonar Law and we agreed that the vacant Secretaryship of State should be offered—subject to the King's consent—to Austen Chamberlain. He was out of town at the time, but he motored to London at Bonar Law's request. Before, however, he reached Downing Street, Ian Macpherson, the Under-Secretary for the War Office, called at 11, Downing Street to inform Bonar Law that he had succeeded in persuading Derby to withdraw his resignation ! The following day Bonar Law reported the appointment of Henry Wilson to the Cabinet and it was approved by them without a single protest. But the struggle was by no means over.

Letters appeared in the Press which showed that the issue was to be fought out in Parliament, and

the line upon which it was to be fought was indicated very definitely in the critical journals. As one of them put it :—

“ The House of Commons, as representing the nation, has got to choose between the two men, Mr. Lloyd George and Sir William Robertson, and to choose between them with regard to a military question. That is the true issue. No one can be at one and the same time on the side of the Prime Minister and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. (Sir William Robertson has told us that he has not resigned.) ”

I decided to make a statement in the House of Commons on the 19th. I quote two or three extracts from that statement :—

“ The Government were extremely anxious to retain the services of Sir William Robertson as Chief of Staff as long as that was compatible with the policy on which they had decided, in common with the Allied Governments, after prolonged consultation at Versailles. It is a matter of the deepest regret to the Government that it was found to be incompatible with that policy to retain the services of so distinguished a soldier. If the policy be right, no personalities should stand in the way of its execution, however valuable, however important, however distinguished. If the policy be wrong, no personalities and no Government ought to stand in the way of its being instantly defeated.

What is the policy? I have already explained to the House. . . . It is not merely the policy of this Government. It is the policy of the great Allied Governments in council. There is absolutely no difference between our policy and the policy of France, Italy and America in this respect. In fact, some of the conclusions to which we came at Versailles were the result of very powerful representations made by the representatives of other Governments, notably the American Government. That policy is a policy which is based on the assumption that the Allies hitherto have suffered through lack of concerted and co-ordinated effort. There was a very remarkable quotation in yesterday's *Manchester Guardian* which, if the House will permit me, I will read, because I think it gives the pith of the whole controversy :—

‘ Some great soldier once said that to find the real effective strength of an alliance you must halve its nominal resources to allow for the effect of divided counsels and dispersed effort.’

Our purpose and our policy has been to get rid of that halving of the resources of the Allies, so that, instead of dispersion of effort, there should be concentration and unity of effort. There is a saying attributed to a very distinguished living French statesman, which is rather cynical, that—

‘ The more he knows of this War, the less convinced he is that Napoleon was a great soldier, for the simple reason that Napoleon had only to fight coalitions all his life ’.”

I then recapitulated the effect of the Versailles proposals, and I gave my reason for the final decision of the Versailles Supreme War Council not to appoint the Chiefs of the Staff as members of the Board controlling the Reserves and for according to them an independent position :—

“ . . . Nobody could tell where a decision would have to be taken. The men who take the decision ought to be within half an hour's reach. Eight hours, ten hours might be fatal. We felt it was essential that whatever body you set up should be a body of men who were there at least within half an hour of the time when the Council would have to sit, in order to take a decision. Nobody knows what movement the Germans may make. There may be a sudden move here or there, and preconceived plans may be completely shattered by some movement taken by the enemy. Therefore, it was essential that the body to decide should be a body sitting continuously in session.

The third reason was this : Not merely have they to take decision instantly, but they ought to be there continually sitting together, comparing notes, and discussing developments from day to day, because a situation which appears like this to-day may be absolutely changed to-morrow. You may have a decision in London, and telegraph it over to Versailles, but by the time it reaches there you may have a complete change in the whole situation. Therefore, we felt it was essential that these men should be sitting together, so that whatever change in the situation took place they

could compare notes, discuss the thing together, and be able to come to a decision, each helping the other to arrive at that decision. . . .

If the Chiefs of the Staff sat in Paris, it meant that the Governments would be deprived for long periods of their principal military advisers, at a critical time, and at a time when action on other vital matters on other fronts might be required. Therefore, I have no hesitation in saying that the moment it comes to be examined—although we examined it with the greatest predisposition in its favour—it was found to be absolutely unworkable, for the simple reason that the moment the Chief of the Staff went to Paris, he would cease to be the chief military adviser of the Government, and either Versailles would have to be satisfied with a deputy who could not act without instructions, or the Government would have to be satisfied with a deputy who was not their full military adviser. For that reason, the Supreme Council rejected that proposal with complete unanimity. I think I am right in saying that the proposals were withdrawn. It was felt even by those who put them forward that, at any rate, without very complete changes, those proposals were not workable.

Then it was suggested by the French Prime Minister that it would be desirable for each national delegation to think out some other plan for itself, and to bring it there to the next meeting, and that was done. It is very remarkable that, meeting separately, and considering the matter quite independently, we each came there with exactly the same proposal the following morning, and that proposal is the one which now holds the field. I

hesitated for some time as to whether I should not read to the House the very cogent document submitted by the American delegation, which put the case for the present proposal. It is one of the most powerful documents—I think my right hon. friends who have had the advantage of reading it will agree with me—one of the ablest documents ever submitted to a military conference, in which they urged the present course, and gave grounds for it. . . .”

I also once more emphasised the fact that the Generals were present and took part in the discussion :—

“ Sir William Robertson was present, and nothing was then said or indicated to me that Sir William Robertson regarded the plan as either unworkable or dangerous.”

(This statement was never challenged by Sir William Robertson or his friends.)

I then informed the House of the interview I had with Sir Douglas Haig :—

“ I was specially anxious that the Commander-in-Chief, who is more directly concerned in the matter than even the Chief of Staff, because it affected operations, perhaps, primarily in France, should be satisfied that the arrangements that were made would be workable as far as he was concerned. Therefore, before I arrived at this arrangement, I invited him to come over here. I had a talk with him, and he said that he was prepared to work under this arrangement.”

I then recapitulated the alternative offers made to Sir William Robertson and his refusal of both the Versailles post and the position of C.I.G.S. under the new arrangement.

*Offers to
Robertson*

“ We had to take the decision, and it was a very painful decision, of having to choose between the policy deliberately arrived at unanimously by the representatives of the Allied Powers, in the presence of their military advisers, and of retaining the services of a very distinguished and a very valued public servant.”

I paid a warm tribute to his capacity, his character and his attractive personality.

I added that :—

“ During the whole of the two to three years I had been associated with him, our personal relations had been not merely friendly, but cordial, and that even at the final interview, where I did my best to urge Sir William Robertson to take one or other of the alternatives offered to him, we parted with expressions of great kindness.”

I then dwelt upon the difficulties, not merely practical difficulties, but difficulties due to national sentiment and historical traditions, in the way of securing co-operation between Allies. I ended on a personal note :—

“ . . . I ask the House to consider this : We are faced with terrible realities. Let us see what is the position. The enemy have rejected, in language which was quoted here the other day

from the Kaiser, the most moderate terms ever put forward, terms couched in such moderate language that the whole of civilisation accepted them as reasonable. Why has he done it? It is obvious. He is clearly convinced that the Russian collapse puts it within his power to achieve a military victory, and to impose Prussian dominance by force upon Europe. That is what we are confronted with, and I do beg this House, when you are confronted with that, to close down all controversy and to close our ranks.

If this policy, deliberately adopted by the representatives of the great Allied countries in Paris, does not commend itself to the House, turn it down quickly and put in a Government who will go and say they will not accept it. But it must be another Government. But do not let us keep the controversy alive. The Government are entitled to know, and I say so respectfully, to know to-night whether the House of Commons and the nation wish that the Government should proceed upon a policy deliberately arrived at, with a view to organising our forces to meet the onset of the foe. For my part—and I should only like to say one personal word—during the time I have held this position, I have endeavoured to discharge its terrible functions to the utmost limits of my capacity and strength. If the House of Commons to-night repudiates the policy for which I am responsible, and on which I believe the saving of this country depends, I shall quit office with but one regret—that is, that I have not had greater strength and greater ability to place at the disposal of my native land in the gravest hour of its danger.”

In reply, Asquith was unexpectedly mild, and it was evident that the advertised parliamentary challenge to our action would not materialise on this occasion. He was still distrustful of arrangements which would subordinate the British Army to Allied control, but he said :—

*Parliament
does not
challenge
decision*

“ I do not ask the House—for though I have every respect for it, I do not think we are an adequate tribunal to determine matters of this kind—I do not ask the House to pronounce its opinion one way or the other on this question ; but I am sure the Government realise that they are taking upon themselves a great responsibility in discarding, on a question of that kind, a system which has been devised with the greatest strategical and technical authority.”

Sir William Robertson left the War Office and took up the Eastern Command. His place was taken by Sir Henry Wilson. It is characteristic of Wilson's selfishness and ingratitude that the only comment he makes in his diary on the night of his appointment by me to the chief position in the Army was that it had been delayed for 11 days owing to my indecision. Eleven days spent in anxious conferences, in fighting through his policy and his promotion amongst Ministers and on the floor of the House of Commons ! Invariably to me personally he was effusive. Behind my back he was abusive. One can understand the imputation of treachery which was associated with his name, and which, by the entries of his diary, he has done his best to justify.

*Wilson
appointed*

After these Parliamentary and Cabinet discussions, the interviews with Haig and the change in the War Office, the crisis was over. The Versailles decisions had been accepted by Parliament and by public opinion and we were prepared to go forward with their execution. Why then were they not carried out? One reason was the time lost in these distracting controversies. The other was the change in the attitude of the French Government.

*Waste of
time aids
wreck of
scheme for
reserves*

Priceless weeks had been wasted. A great deal of the energy and nerve of the Government had been consumed in an internecine struggle, which did not contribute in the least to the effective prosecution of the campaign. On the contrary, it took our attention away from matters of vital importance which required constant vigilance and supervision. The consequent delay and distraction had a great deal to do with the failure of the project to organise a General Reserve in time for the German offensive. There is nothing more absorbing or wearing than a prolonged parliamentary or Ministerial crisis. In peace it is the inevitable price of democratic government. Even then it hinders progress. In war, it engenders calamity. It is no use underrating the gravity of the crisis and treating it as if it were only a question of whether one set or another of politicians should sit in Downing Street. It was above all an issue as to whether the Government of the day as the sole representative of the national authority vested in King and Parliament should still be supreme in the exercise of its legitimate functions or whether the power should pass into the hands of the War Office. Had the conspirators won, the next Government would have been practically their creation and the

Ministers their creatures. No Ministry, having our fate before their eyes, would have dared to challenge any decree issued by the General Staff. Least of all could you expect independence of judgment in a Ministry composed of the men who had got into power on the cry of "Trust the Two Generals" in preference to trusting a Council representing the statesmen and soldiers of all the Allies.

But that was not the only peril with which we were confronted in this unpleasant conflict. It looked at one time as if the national unity might be put in jeopardy on the worst issue that could be debated during the War—the merits or demerits of rival Generals and of competitive strategical plans. The discussion actually began in the Press—it continued in Parliament—on those lines. In the course of such a discussion much was revealed which helped the enemy. If it had continued much longer, more and more intelligence would have leaked out. I declined to enter into that discussion, but if the Government had fallen and a War Office Cabinet had been substituted for the War Cabinet, then bitter controversy would have developed, and it would have been difficult to restrain one set of partisans in defending their decisions against attack, from inadvertently following the example already set by the others. From this danger Haig's refusal to join the intrigue helped to save the nation by the correct and patriotic attitude he assumed. He took his stand on the constitutional position that it was for the War Cabinet to decide and that it was the business of the soldiers to accept their decision and to act upon it. Had he stood by this position to the end what a difference it would

*Threat to
national unity :
Haig's
patriotic
attitude*

have made to the course of events in the spring offensive !

Robertson alone, without the glamour of Haig's prestige, was not powerful enough to overturn Ministers. Had we been faced with the resignation of both, the struggle would have been harder and the issue more doubtful. It was a misfortune to the British Army that Haig did not in the ensuing week continue to follow the fine example of constitutional loyalty he himself had set on this occasion. His failure to do so on the question of the General Reserve was disastrous in the event. But the main responsibility for his subsequent conduct is attributable to the encouragement he received from the departure of Pétain and Clemenceau from the decisions of Versailles.

CHAPTER LXXVII

BEFORE THE OFFENSIVE

BEFORE I tell the story of the doom of the General Reserve I propose to give a sketch of the military situation in France at the date of the distracting and futile discussions which I have already related. A great enemy offensive on the Western Front was now an assured prospect. Division after division was hurried up from Russia to the West, and there was every indication of great preparations for an attack. The Germans, by every artifice in the disposition of their reserves and material, managed for some time to conceal the direction and point of their onslaught. Haig did not believe in an offensive on a large scale. His view, expressed to the War Cabinet on January 7th, was that the Germans would "attempt to destroy the morale of the enemy peoples by attacks of limited scope, such as against Châlons, Arras or some salient." The latter seemed to him to be the more probable course for the enemy to adopt, because an offensive on a large scale made with the object of piercing the front and reaching Calais or Paris, for instance, would be very costly. Another reason assigned by him for doubting an attack on a grand scale with the object of breaking our line has a

considerable bearing on the discussion about the disposition of British man-power. He said :—

“ Moreover the German man-power situation did not seem very satisfactory.”

Although Haig subsequently altered his opinion as to the purpose of the German attack and came to the conclusion that the Germans would attempt to force a decision, he still held to his original idea that the attack would not be on a wide front, but that there would be limited offensives, a punch here, and a blow there on both the French as well as the British Fronts. Even on 16th February, when Haig held a conference of his Generals at Doullens, and gave to them his appreciation of the situation, “ he thought the main effort would be against the French, and that the indications from the British Front showed no signs of an imminent attack.”* I agree with General Gough that “ it is not easy to understand how the Commander-in-Chief arrived at some of his conclusions, because at that very conference Brigadier-General Cox, the new Chief of the Intelligence Section of G.H.Q., estimated that out of the 68 German Divisions in reserve, 50 were on the British Front. He expected an attack in or before March.” In spite of this information from his own Intelligence Section, Haig adhered to his own prediction. He only changed his mind on the subject three or four weeks before the attack, when it became abundantly clear from the immensity of the German preparations opposite our lines that the attack was coming there and on a scale

*Main attack
to be against
French*

* Gough, p. 236.

unparalleled by any offensive on either side during the War. Even up to the last, G.H.Q. refused to believe that the attack would cover the Fifth Army Front.

Pétain, like Haig, had also come to the conclusion that the German attack would be on both fronts simultaneously : two on the French and

*Pétain holds
same view*

one on the British ; and he, misled as the Germans hoped he would be by the preparations staged on his front, held to that opinion even after the attack of the 21st March. He distributed his reserves on that assumption, many of them at the remote southern end of his front ; and his subsequent reluctance to part with his reserve divisions was due to the conviction that the German attack on the French Front would come as soon as he had thrown his reserves into the Somme battle. The French High Command was haunted by the fear of an offensive through Switzerland, like the offensive through Belgium of 1914. This operated to our disadvantage, for the French were piled up at the end of the line furthest from us.

Ludendorff had decided that his first attack must be on the British Front and that it must be on a colossal scale with a view to shattering

*Ludendorff's
programme*

the Third and Fifth Armies and turning the whole British line. The weather is too uncertain in Flanders for any operations in the early spring. The further south the area of the offensive, the earlier could it be launched. Hindenburg said the idea of an attack in the Flanders and Lys area was set aside because up to the middle of April the country in that quarter was an unparalleled swamp. When the Germans were induced

by the exceptional dryness of the spring to begin their attack on the plain of the Lys in the second week of April, their progress was retarded by the morassy condition of the ground. Now the submarines were failing to prevent the steady arrival of American troops ; thus the German High Command realised the importance of forcing a decision at the earliest possible date, and they could not postpone their first blow beyond March. If they succeeded in their aim of smashing the British Army in the spring, the American troops arriving in the summer would be too late to retrieve the Allied position. It was a shrewd effort to make the best of a situation which was growing increasingly precarious for the Central Powers. Their man-power was at the point of exhaustion, and there was no reservoir upon which they could draw. For them there was no America providing an untapped source of millions of virile young men of the best fighting qualities. Their food situation was becoming increasingly serious.

*Weakness of
Germany's
allies*

Their allies were sagging, and every German statesman and soldier knew that neither Austria, Turkey nor Bulgaria could be relied upon if the strain continued much longer. It is not creditable to our Intelligence organisation that we did not appreciate how the allies of Germany were gradually disintegrating. If the War Office had any secret information on the point they carefully withheld it from the War Cabinet and it played no part in the strategical plans of the High Command. They did not wish to give us any encouragement to direct any part of our forces to the task of finishing off the tottering confederates of our greatest foe. For that reason they always exaggerated grossly the numbers of the

Turks and the prowess of the Bulgarians, and they certainly gave us no idea of the dejection and demoralisation that prevailed in Austria. But the Germans were under no delusion as to the real position. Their allies might be kept up leaning in their trenches with a rifle on the parapet for another year, but no longer. Hindenburg in his biographical notes shows how much these considerations were responsible for the March offensive :—

“ Even though at the end of 1917 I considered that there was nothing to make me doubt the ability of us Germans to continue our resistance through the coming year, I could not conceal from myself the regrettable decay of the powers of resistance of our allies. We must devote all our resources to secure a victorious conclusion of the War. That was the more or less expressed demand of all our allies.”*

An early decision—and the earlier the better—was imperative if the Entente were to be forced into a satisfactory peace. That decided Ludendorff in favour of an attack on the only part of the British line where owing to weather conditions operations in March were practicable. A further inducement was the fact that at this point the defences were in an unsatisfactory condition and the line was weakly held. Ludendorff's final decisions were arrived at on the 21st January. He then definitely settled on the plan which was put into operation on March 21st. All preparations were to be ready by March 10th.

It is interesting now to know that Ludendorff's

* Marshal von Hindenburg : “ Out of My Life,” p. 340.

ablest Staff officer, Colonel Wetzell, advised an attack on the French in preference to the British Front. His reasons are flattering to the British soldier, although not complimentary to their leaders.

*Wetzell's view
of British
quality*

His first reason was that—

“we have a strategically clumsy, tactically rigid, but tough enemy in front of us.”

He went on—

“The French have shown us what they can do. They are just as skilful in the tactical use of their artillery as of their infantry. Their use of ground in the attack is just as good as in the defence. The French are better in the attack and more skilful in the defence, but are not such good stayers as the British.”

He also said that on this part of the front—

“the British infantry is very fully equipped with machine-guns, etc.”

I hope my military critics may one day find not only the space but also the grace to give one line of acknowledgment to the fact that the plenitude of machine-guns, etc., was due to action taken by a civilian against the advice of Generals.

The Germans evidently thought little of our military leaders but they had a wholesome respect for the tenacious valour of the officers and men who held the British lines in front of them. And although Colonel Wetzell thought the French more skilful strategically and tactically, they were not considered to be as good stickers as the men whom he alludes to further on as “the obstinate British.”

Wetzell was very right when he thought it a mistake to rely on breaking through a line held by British soldiers ! They do not retreat with sufficient celerity to guarantee that an attack will reach its objective before the reserves arrive, even when those reserves are delayed by misunderstanding and muddle. The battle of the 21st March completely vindicated Wetzell's insight and foresight. He counselled an attack to pinch out Verdun because if it succeeded it would strike a deadly blow against the French. He did not preclude the possibility of a complete military collapse of the French Army.

He makes a point which has a decided bearing on the difficulties we subsequently experienced in extricating reserves from the north. He points out that we were "strategically tied in Flanders." How true that was will become more and more apparent as the story develops. Wetzell was doubtless thinking partly of the Channel Ports. But in addition, we were far too much committed to the Passchendaele salient. We could not spare the necessary troops from the defence of an unthreatened sector to save from destruction the very Fifth Army that won it, for what it was worth, at an appalling cost.

The "Versailles soldiers" were of opinion that the first attack would be on the British Front and that the Germans would mass an enormous striking force with a view to breaking through on a wide front in the Arras area. But wherever the attack ultimately came there was no difference of opinion that a great German offensive was contemplated and that the Allies had to make every preparation within the limit of their resources to meet it. It was generally

*British tied
to Flanders*

*Forecast of
Versailles
experts*

agreed that everything must be done to repel the attack and hold the line until the Americans arrived in sufficient numbers to give the Allies that superiority in men which would enable them to take the offensive.

At this stage I do not propose to discuss the comparative strength of the rival armies. I deal with it in another chapter. It was at one time a subject of hot controversy, and so much heat remains in the cinders of that dispute that it is not easy to handle the subject. The evidence placed before the German Reichstag Committee that inquired into the responsibility for the March, 1918, offensive stated the position as being "a slight superiority in numbers" for the Germans, but inferiority in guns; that meant, if you accept Haig's estimate as to the lost morale of the Germans, a definite German inferiority in fighting strength. This fact may account for the complete absence of panic or even acute apprehension in Allied military circles before the battle. All were confident of the result or at least complacent about it. The only thing necessary to repel an attack on a fortified position defended by an army as strong as the assailants was that the defenders should make the best use of their positions and of their forces.

What were the requisites of defensive preparation?

Firstly, to put our defences in order: not merely the front line, but the battle zone, which had to be held at all costs if we were driven out of our front trenches—and then a further defensive system in the rear of the battle zone where we could fall back if the enemy succeeded in penetrating our second line of entrenchments.

*Allies strong
enough for
defence*

*Conditions
for successful
defence*

Secondly, that the best use should be made of all the troops available by a rearrangement of the whole of our forces from Ypres to the Somme. The troops ought to have been so distributed that the part of the line which was known to be threatened should have an adequate defensive force both as to the numbers in the line and reserves behind. It was imperative that our strength should be economised and fully utilised by withdrawing divisions from indefensible salients, the holding of which was not essential to the defence of the line as a whole. It was very difficult to find enough men for all the war services of the Empire : this judicious rearrangement was a paramount consideration.

Thirdly, we were bound to secure the advantage of a single united front by means of the creation of a Central Inter-Allied Reserve disposed under a central direction and in suitable areas. Thus the Allied Reserves would be available to aid a hard-pressed sector wherever it was.

Fourthly, also to send from England every man that was needed to strengthen the line in France and to raise and train every available man that could be spared from our depleted resources of man-power, but without disregarding the demands of other equally essential services.

Fifthly, to make arrangements for bringing to France from Egypt without delay all the British troops in the three divisions which were to be filled with Indian troops and to bring either British or Italian divisions from the Italian Front.

I propose now to examine how those responsible for directing the defensive preparations discharged their responsibilities. Take first of all the putting in order of the defensive positions on our front.

Between June, 1916, and early December, 1917, the British Army had been engaged in offensive operations on a great scale. In the course of these battles, all the available labour in the British Army was concentrated on preparations for an advance.

This involved the employment of an enormous number of men in the making and repairing of roads, railways, new aerodromes, hutments and structures of all kinds. One can judge the additional strain which these demands put upon our man-power by quoting one figure—the labour forces in our army in France increased from 80,524 in January, 1917, to 302,904 in December, 1917. Of these, only 98,574 were coloured. As a consequence partly of the fighting, and partly of the baffling German withdrawal which Hindenburg so skilfully executed in March, 1917, in order to shorten the line and thereby increase his reserves, our front line had to be brought forward and our battle zone defences had to be reorganised. On the Somme and the Scarpe, at Vimy, Messines and Passchendaele, the close of 1917 saw us with a new front line. The thoughts of Headquarters were, however, so completely concentrated on the Flemish offensive that the preparation of new defensive lines was to a very large extent neglected on our front. In the area handed over to us by the French, the French front line was in fairly good condition, but behind that line the defences were negligible. General Gough says that the French had handed over part of their defences to the owners of the soil, who had filled in the trenches and ploughed them over. At the time, the British

*Bad state of
Fifth Army
trenches*

Army was engaged in offensive operations which demanded the energies practically of the whole of its available engineering and labour strength. Haig had hardly at his disposal a sufficient number of men to strengthen his new positions in the Passchendaele and Flesquières salients and at the same time to reorganise the defences of the line taken over from the French. He had therefore to choose the sectors on which he would concentrate most of his engineers and his labour battalions. He clearly ought to have devoted his first attention to the sector which was the most likely to be first attacked. For climatic reasons an offensive in upper Flanders was unlikely and well-nigh impossible until April whilst an attack on the Somme was a feasible operation a month earlier. That consideration never seems to have occurred to him. He pressed on with his Passchendaele defences with all his available resources as if an attack were imminent, whilst he attended in a leisurely fashion to the sector doomed to an early assault on an overwhelming scale. The Army occupying the sector to the south of Amiens, that was to be attacked with such overwhelming force in March, was made up of survivors of the tired and exhausted troops. Their strength and their spirit had been worn out in the muddy battlefields of Flanders. Even in numbers they were weaker than those which he allocated to the defence of any other part of his line. Both in engineers and in labour his greatest activity was directed to the strengthening of the defences of the Passchendaele salient. A month after he took over the French line, there were only 626 labourers allocated to the preparation of the defences of the Fifth Army. At the end of another month there were only 3,120.

*Labour
withheld*

A report which had reached me on the subject caused a communication to G.H.Q. in France from the Cabinet on the labour deficiency in the area of Fifth Army. This had the effect of inducing them to send a stronger contingent ; but by March 16th there were only 8,830 labourers actually working on trenches and machine-gun positions and wiring in the battle zone.

A comparison of the number of engineering companies in the Passchendaele sector and that defended by the Third and Fifth Armies, just before the battle, will give an idea of the attention which our Headquarters gave to the defences of the two sectors respectively.

Sixty-eight R.E. Companies and Units were allocated to the Second Army for a front of 23 miles. The First Army was given 56 for its 33 miles ; the Third Army, 54 companies for its 28 miles ; and the Fifth Army, where the defences stood most in need of restoration and improvement, 56 companies for its 42 miles. That meant 3 companies to every mile in the Passchendaele area ; $1\frac{3}{4}$ companies to the adjoining Army. The threatened Third Army was given 2 companies per mile, but the Fifth Army had only $1\frac{1}{2}$ companies per mile of its menaced line. That is, the Fifth Army, whose defences were in the worst state of all, was given to repair its deficiencies, even when it was evident that a great attack was coming on that part of the front, less than half of the assistance allotted to the Passchendaele Army where there was no great concentration of German troops to indicate an imminent attack. The result was that when the attack came, the defences were found to be utterly inadequate either to offer resistance or to delay the German masses. This will be evident

from an extract from a report sent by G.H.Q. to the War Office on March 12th, 1918, which states that :—

“the forward and battle zones were partially wired, and a beginning had been made towards preparing certain localities for defence, but the rest of the main line of defences, in the rear zone, was only spit-locked.*”†

General Edmonds, the compiler of the Official History, who was sent by the Engineer-in-Chief on March 14th, a week before the great battle, with Brigadier-General H. Bid-
Evidence of General Edmonds dulph, R.E., to report on the Fifth Army defences, “found that the front line only of the rear zone was marked out by a continuous ribbon of trench, seven feet wide and a foot deep, with occasional small belts of wire (tactical wire sited for sweeping by machine-guns ; protective wire was to follow later). The sites for machine-guns and strong points were marked by notice-boards.”‡ These were the defences which had been prepared in the event of a break-through of the forward line for defending a retreating army against overwhelming numbers.

This description of the lamentable condition of the line which the shattered and now neglected Fifth Army were doomed to defend is corroborated by General Gough in his story of what happened before and during the battle. So much for the first requisite.

* Marked out on the surface with a pickaxe.

† “ Official History, France and Belgium, 1918, ” Vol. I, p. 123

‡ *ibid.* p. 123.

Now for the second requisite. What about the disposition made of the British troops to meet the impending blow? Whatever Haig's anticipations might have been in January and the first fortnight or three weeks of February as to the direction and strength of the German offensive, by the end of February there ought to have been no doubt even in his obdurate mind as to the part of the front against which the attack would be launched nor as to the scale upon which it would be made. By the end of February and the first week in March the evidence of German preparations opposite the Third and Fifth Armies had accumulated to such an extent as to make it certain that the thrust was to be aimed at that sector of the line and that it would come soon and suddenly. Immense masses of troops, guns and material were gathered in that area. New aerodromes had been erected. Huge dumps of ammunition could be seen. New roads and railways were being constructed to feed the attack with the necessary supplies for a costly offensive. Hospitals were put up. Where the Germans had had one army in front of the Arras-St. Quentin line there were now three. All these obvious preparations for an offensive on an immense scale were made opposite the Third and Fifth Armies. Strong corroboration was supplied by our discovery through our Intelligence Service that Von Hutier, the conqueror of Riga, had been brought over from Russia to command the troops opposite the Fifth Army. He had been Ludendorff's favoured choice for command whenever one of his great offensives in the East had to be carried out. All this was known four weeks before the attack began.

*Area of
attack known
in advance*

Haig in his despatches writes :—

“ . . . By the end of February, 1918, these preparations had become very marked opposite the front held by the Third and Fifth British Armies, and I considered it probable that the enemy would make his initial effort from the Sensée River southwards. As the 21st March approached it became certain that an attack on this sector was imminent, and counter-preparation was carried out nightly by our artillery on the threatened front.”*

In view of this fact the distribution of our troops at that date is incomprehensible. Including reserve divisions, there were on the Passchendaele sector—at the extreme left of the British Front where no attack was anticipated—*Unwise distribution of reserves* 14 divisions with 34 brigades of artillery and 25 siege batteries, not brigaded, allocated to defend an unthreatened line of 23 miles. The First Army immediately to the right of Passchendaele was not then menaced. Nevertheless it had 16 divisions with 29 brigades of artillery and 15 siege batteries not brigaded for a front of 33 miles. The tired and threatened Fifth Army had 14 divisions (plus three cavalry divisions, equal to one of infantry) with 46 brigades of artillery and 15 siege batteries not brigaded for a front of 42 miles ill-supplied as it was with defensive positions. The Third Army was a little better off in men and artillery but not as favoured as the Flanders Army. The Passchendaele sector had nearly one division for every one and a half miles of front it held : the Fifth Army, which G.H.Q. knew were about to bear the brunt of an attack more

* “ Sir Douglas Haig’s Despatches,” p. 182.

formidable than any yet staged in this War, were allowed one division for every three miles of front. In addition the Passchendaele sector had two or three times as much heavy artillery per mile in its support as the neglected Fifth Army. This is the treatment Haig accorded to the army that had at his bidding fought so valiantly for his impossible enterprise in Flanders. Eight divisions were holding the Passchendaele salient alone and another five divisions the Flesquières salient. Haig had in his December memorandum intimated to his subordinate Commanders that both these salients were indefensible and were to be abandoned in the event of a heavy attack. Yet when an attack of a magnitude such as he had never seen or contemplated was about to be hurled on the weakest part of his line and he was short of reserves to meet it, he practically immobilised 13 divisions of his best troops in these worthless and indefensible salients. Ultimately, as the battle developed, first the Flesquières and then the Passchendaele salients had to be abandoned, but only after great confusion had been caused and much damage had been inflicted on the British Army by the reckless and foolish decision to weaken our front at the point of danger, in order to hold these trophies of a blundering and blundered campaign.

Ludendorff, when trying to explain the weakness of our line at the point of attack—the faulty distribution of our troops—attributed it to the skill and care with which the attacking army had concealed their movements by night marches and other expedients. He boasts that the enemy had not discovered any of his vast preparations. He could not believe that our

*Germans
attribute
blunder to
our ignorance*

Commander knew what was coming "otherwise his defensive measures would have been more effective and his reserves would have arrived more quickly." He was very much mistaken. Captain Wright writes* : "General Cox, of G.H.Q. Intelligence, not only gave the exact area of the attack (a portion of the German line which was lying hushed and motionless while the whole of the rest of it flared up with artillery raids and preparations) but tipped the exact date on 20th or 21st March." In fact, as usual, everything worked to perfection in our Army except the minds of the Commanders. Hindenburg also, in his book, dwells on the way the British had distributed their forces, massing troops in Flanders and leaving the St. Quentin sector to be held weakly, also holding a salient at Flesquières which could be pinched out. He gives these dispositions as one of the reasons why the attack was made at the southern end of our line. He adds, "of course, it was always doubtful whether the English would keep their forces distributed in that way until our attack began." He, like Ludendorff, can find no explanation for their doing so, except the skill displayed by the Germans in concealing their intentions. Had he known that Haig had been fully informed by the end of February of these intentions, he would have had to fall back on another explanation which he gives earlier in his book—that the "English methods were too rigid." The English tacticians "did not understand how to meet rapid changes in the situation." G.H.Q. had made their dispositions on another assumption. They required more than four weeks and several hard knocks on the head in order to change their minds.

* Peter E. Wright : "At the Supreme War Council," p. 125.

Ludendorff was responsible for the withdrawal of the Germans from the Somme salient in 1917 in order to save troops. A great attack was coming on his front and he wanted to build up his reserves for the battle. He could not comprehend Generals wasting their troops in holding worthless ground whilst they were short of defenders for another part of the line threatened by a huge force.

Haig's action is unaccountable. History can recall many cases of men in great positions who have been known to do inexplicable things in a great emergency. It is true that he was very much annoyed with the French for depriving him of his last chance of continuing his cherished Flanders plan by forcing him to extend his line. He felt he had sufficiently done his duty by sending the Fifth Army to occupy their trenches. If these were attacked it was for Pétain and not for him to dispatch adequate reinforcements. What happened after the first day of the battle gives a certain colour to this explanation. After much searching and questioning I can find no other. But the underlying motive which dominated Haig's dispositions for the great battle was the fetter of Passchendaele. It is not surprising that Wetzell in his famous diagnosis of the situation in December, 1917, said repeatedly that the British Army was "strategically tied to Flanders" and that the French were more dangerous because they had no such strategic chain. One of the legs of the Army was stuck in the great quagmire and it could not march to its greatest need. The evil wrought by Passchendaele was not at an end. It was responsible for the loss, running to hundreds of thousands, of trained officers and men at a time when both were badly

*Mystery of
Haig's action*

needed. It wore out a splendid army to such an extent that they were too exhausted either to train for the coming battle or to prepare the necessary defences to fight it under conditions that would give them any chance of holding their own. It robbed them of the engineering and labour assistance which was necessary to enable them to put their defences in order. It left them without a sufficiency of troops to hold so long a line and it deprived them of the reserves which alone would have enabled them to check and counter-attack the enemy. Passchendaele was a festering sore which weakened the strength of the Army and diverted the attention urgently required for other weaknesses and defects in its system.

It is difficult to find any favourable explanation for Haig's extraordinary behaviour towards the Fifth Army. It was the remnant of the fine
Neglect of Fifth Army army which had served him with such inexhaustible courage in the greatest trial of endurance and valour to which any army had ever been subjected. It was led by a gallant officer who was an old friend of Sir Douglas Haig, and who had given to his chief an example of loyal and devoted obedience in the carrying out of plans in which he had ceased to have faith. In explanation of Haig's conduct it might be argued that no man carries out instructions of which he disapproves with the alacrity and zeal he displays when the orders commend themselves to his judgment. And constitutionally stubborn men such as Haig are apt to carry resentment so far into the realm of reluctance as to thwart and defeat the odious command and to punish with failure those who have issued it. We had already suffered from this temper

in the early spring when every kind of tiresome question was raised to delay the Nivelle offensive. These delays were largely responsible for its defeat. Had the Government fallen in with Haig's plans for a resumption of the offensive in the spring of 1918, backed him through and through in his refusal to take up more line, sent him all the reinforcements he asked for, withdrawn divisions from the East and thus gathered together another immense army to be thrown into the Passchendaele salient for another great push, there would have been in his preparations on the Flanders Front none of the fatal dawdling and tardiness which characterised his treatment of the problem of improving the defences of the poor abandoned Fifth Army in the Somme area. He would have found all the labour that was necessary to make the preparations, all the reserves required to support the attack. But this St. Quentin Front was not his concern. He had another and a better plan and the French and the British Governments had between them thrown it over, and substituted this arrangement which deprived him of the great part he had mapped out for himself. The responsibility was theirs and it was their business to see it through. He would just obey orders. The Fifth Army could take over that line and those who had declined to accept sound advice would see what happened when it was neglected! The obstinate mind with a grievance is an ill-balanced mind and finds it difficult to conform to conditions which have been forced upon it by others. There are plenty of historical illustrations in every sphere of responsibility, of greater men than Haig who failed to engage their full powers in enterprises of which they disapproved. In those cases resignation, or direct refusal,

is the only reputable course and to that extent Sir William Robertson, when he had no faith in a scheme, played a more honourable part than Sir Douglas Haig.

In brief, the Fifth Army was not beaten through any deficiency of skill or courage on the part of its own officers or men, or through any lack of provision or proficiency in its own Commander, but through causes for which the General Headquarters of the Army were mainly responsible. When it was settled that the British Army had to take over that sector of the line it is not clear that G.H.Q. made any preliminary inspection of the state of its defences and communications; certainly they imposed no terms on the French that they should remedy the defects before the British took over. When it was taken over they did not furnish General Gough with the necessary means to undertake the task. They only supplied him with labour under pressure from the Government weeks after he had occupied the neglected area. Even then it was quite unequal to the minimum requirements. They gave him no reserves in the least adequate to the menace, and even when it was certain that an overwhelming blow was directed at that point, they moved no adequate reserves to his support. When the battle was joined and the Fifth Army was fighting a desperate rearguard action against forces which were three times as strong as its own, assistance was sent slowly and grudgingly. It was only late at night on the second day of the battle that G.H.Q. invited aid from the French. When it is also borne in mind that the British Commander-in-Chief declined to join in the formation of a General Reserve that would have

averted the whole disaster, it is not difficult to affix the responsibility for what occurred in the March offensive. This brings me to the third requisite I have mentioned.

It was not only essential that the British Army should have its troops distributed in such a way as to make the most effective use of its *Lack of Allied co-operation* entire strength in the coming battle, but that the Allied Army as a whole should do so. This was not a limited offensive affecting one sector of the line ; it was the beginning of a great battle in which the Germans aimed at destroying both the British and the French Armies in succession before the Americans started to count as a formidable force. First the British were to be attacked and crumpled up, then the French were to be broken and scattered. It was to be one vast battle lasting for weeks and fought from the coast to the Swiss borders. But whether the British or the French were to be dealt with first, it was essential that the reserves of both armies should be ready to be thrown in at any crisis of the battle. The Germans had not the necessary numbers to attack both armies simultaneously on that scale. They must therefore be assailed in turn. The German reserves were drawn from all parts of their line but they were concentrated mainly behind the sector of the next offensive and were thrown in under the direction of the Commander-in-Chief of the whole front. Prudence dictated that a similar course should be adopted by the Allies. That is why the War Cabinet gave their strong support to the idea of a General Reserve under a central authority not dependent on the apprehensions or sectional interests of the Commander of either army. It seemed to us to be the only practical and sensible

arrangement short of the appointment of a Generalissimo, which no country and no army on either side was prepared at that date to accept.

*Good
generalship is
common sense*

Strategy is not mumbo-jumbo, as second-rate soldiers would wish us to believe, but the application of common sense and experience to military conditions and illuminated by a flash of imagination. As the latest (1935) edition of the Field Service Regulations rightly points out, "*Tactics on the battlefield are governed by certain simple, common-sense precepts, which are in the main very similar to those which govern everyday life. The ordinary citizen who is planning a business transaction goes through much the same steps as the Commander who is planning an operation.*" Haig rejected the plan of the General Reserve: perhaps it would be more correct to say he never even considered it. Once at Versailles the members of the British Staff played out for him, as a war game on a map, and very accurately, what they thought the forthcoming battle would be and also the way the General Reserve would operate. Haig disdained to accord to the exposition the courtesy of listening to it and sat ostentatiously reading his paper. Eminent soldiers had placed their training and experience at our disposal, and one of them at least, with a mind lit up with the lamp of genius, gave advice which seemed to us to be sound and recommended the General Reserve scheme. Once the battle commenced there was no time for conference between the two Commanders-in-Chief to decide first of all whether the occasion had arisen to throw in fresh divisions, and if so, which should do it. Should Haig, for instance, move his last G.H.Q. reserve into the fight before Pétain drew on his? Haig and Pétain were both convinced that there

would be a triple attack almost simultaneously—one on the British Front and two on the French. Haig reluctantly and tardily changed his mind a few days before the battle. Nevertheless, he did not move one of his reserve divisions from the unthreatened area nearer the battle areas. Pétain still held the opinion that the biggest effort of the Germans would come on his front and that the March offensive was launched in order to induce him to shift his reserves to the British Front and entangle them in that struggle. Haig in his despatch describing the battle and the preparations made for fighting it says :—

“ . . . In addition to our own defensive schemes, completion of arrangements for the closest possible co-operation with the French was recognised to be a matter of great importance and urgency. A comprehensive investigation was undertaken into the various problems connected with the co-operation of the two Allied forces. Plans were drawn up in combination with the French military authorities, *and were worked out in great detail to meet the different situations, which might arise on different parts of the Allied Front. Measures were taken to ensure the smooth and rapid execution of these plans.**

Among the many problems studied by the Allied Staffs, those involved by a hostile offensive on the line of the Somme River and the passage of that river by the enemy had been worked out. The plans were applicable to such a situation, had been drawn up and were ready to be put into execution when required.”†

* My italics.

† “Sir Douglas Haig’s Despatches,” p. 180.

It is conceivable, although not intelligible, that Haig and Pétain may have been under the impression that they had established a workable understanding for mutual assistance ; but how anyone with an actual knowledge of the facts could, after the event, have penned this amazing paragraph about plans for co-operation “ worked out in great detail to meet the different situations,” and “ ready to be put into execution when required,” passes my comprehension. Had Pétain failed to carry out his agreement ? Haig pays him “ a personal tribute for the ready and effective assistance he gave him in the battle.” In fact, Pétain sent more divisions than were stipulated in the agreement, and sent them sooner. That fact, in the light of what happened, forms a grim comment on the efficiency of the agreement by which Haig set such store.

Both Pétain and Haig, when they were seeking to evade contributing to a General Reserve under Foch, assured their respective Governments that they had made the most complete arrangements for coming to each other's aid, whichever was attacked. *Pierrefeu's condemnation* Pierrefeu, the brilliant French writer who was at Pétain's Headquarters during the battle and when preparations for it were being made, categorically denies this statement. He was a strong Pétainist and what he writes is, therefore, not dictated by animus against the French Commander-in-Chief. This is his account of the so-called complete and detailed plans for co-operation between the two armies :—

“ . . . Unity of front not having been realised, it had not been possible to conclude the precise

agreement which, automatically, would have effected the collaboration of forces. In spite of the excellent and friendly relations which united us to the English, there was a wall between the two battle fronts.”*

When we come to what occurred during the fight it will be seen how accurate this description is of the looseness of the understanding reached by Haig and Pétain before a great battle which might have decided the fate of France. The agreement of February 22nd between the two Commanders-in-Chief did pass through the hands of Captain Wright, the Secretary of the Controlling Board. The following is an abstract by him of the agreement made before the battle between Haig and Pétain. He had an opportunity of perusing it at the time.

“The agreement provides that they are to assist each other, but in one way, and one way only ; the extreme French left met the extreme British right at Barisis, the point of junction of the two lines. Whichever of the two was attacked, the other, in case of need, agreed to help his colleague by extending his own line, but by extension only. The helper would thus relieve a certain number of his colleague’s divisions who would be released for use elsewhere. . . . The exact dimensions this extension of either the French left or the British right was to take had to be left unfixed, and depended on the judgment and goodwill of the helper. Further Pétain . . . stipulated that he was

* Jean de Pierrefeu : “ G. Q. G.” Vol. II, p. 127.

only bound to extend his extreme left if we were attacked at a portion of our line other than our extreme right."*

It was an arrangement the most vital details of which were left to be thrashed out and decided after the emergency had arisen.

What had become of the General Reserve which was to be placed under an independent Board as an Army of Manœuvre to meet this very emergency? It had been agreed to by the military as well as the political leaders of the Allies; the Commanders-in-Chief and the Chiefs of Staff of both the French and British Armies had accepted it. Pétain, Haig and Robertson had assented to it as well as Foch. No one would suggest that the great Generals simulated acquiescence in order to trick the political chiefs into a false belief that they had accepted the decisions and meant to abide by them. I would not dare to cast such an aspersion on their straightforwardness. They gave no indication at the Conference that they had any intention of acting upon its decisions. The statesmen left the details to be worked out by and between the Generals in the full confidence that they would honourably carry out a decision in which they had acquiesced. That trustfulness turned out to be a mistake. With our past experience of G.H.Q.'s we ought to have known that it was not enough to decide on the principle of a plan which, however obviously wise, was objectionable to them on personal grounds: it was necessary to determine the actual details. We were anxious to secure the goodwill of the Commanders-in-Chief for the project and get their

* Peter E. Wright : " At the Supreme War Council," p. 87.

wholehearted co-operation in working it out. By that means we hoped to save time and ensure that the scheme would work smoothly and well. We ought either to have remained at Versailles until we had a watertight plan which the Generals could not refuse to operate without a direct challenge of the authority of their respective Governments, or adjourned for a week or ten days and held another session to determine any differences there might be between the Commanders-in-Chief or between the Board and the Commanders-in-Chief. We realised when it was too late how little justified we were in trusting to the good faith and goodwill of men who hated an arrangement to which they had reluctantly agreed. They used every artifice of which the professional mind is capable to delay and by that means to defeat the project. They possessed the skill which is always attributed to a woman when she desires to frustrate an unpalatable wish expressed by her husband. She never commits the error of blunt refusal. She prefers to resort to procrastination. By that method she gets her way in nine cases out of ten. Repington attributes to his friend Sir William Robertson a saying which had reference to the Versailles decisions : " With these politicians the best thing to do is to gain time." All the Services understand the value of that advice when dealing with their political chiefs. One trouble makes you forget another and there are so many in a politician's life that the officials have ample opportunities for manoeuvre. In this case the trouble which took our attention for some time from the execution of the Versailles decisions was caused by Robertson himself. Unfortunately for him, he was not only the source of the trouble, but its first victim. Still, the crisis he fomented

incidentally served one of his main purposes—the postponement of the General Reserve until it was too late to act.

The Robertson episode had one unexpected repercussion which helped to kill the General Reserve.

Original plan for General Reserve The Controlling Board, consisting of Generals Foch, Bliss, Cadorna and Wilson, agreed on February 6th as to the number of divisions that should compose the Reserve, and as to the numbers to be contributed by each army. It was estimated that for the moment a General Reserve of 30 Divisions would suffice. It was to consist of ten British, thirteen French and seven Italian divisions. A note embodying the decision of the Board was immediately sent to General Pétain and General Diaz. General Pétain's first reply, received on February 19th, stated that he could not allot more than eight divisions to the Reserve. Subsequently when it was too late to act, he stated that he had none at all to spare for a General Reserve.

There was curious delay in the dispatch of the note to Sir Douglas Haig. For some odd reason Sir Henry Wilson pocketed the document and said he would deliver it personally to Haig on the way to England. *Wilson muddles dispatch of note to Haig* Wilson had been notified by his friends of the intention of Robertson to challenge the Government on the Versailles scheme, and he knew how it might end. Wilson was a shrewd politician. He also knew how it might affect his own career, and his ardent political supporters warned him to be on the spot to await the issue of the struggle. On it depended his chance of securing a glittering prize which he coveted above all others—the nearest position to that held by the

Commander-in-Chief in his old Army days, but with the command of an army twenty times the size of the one he knew, and that in a world war. He was in too great a hurry to reach the scene of this fateful conflict to spend a night at G.H.Q. and he never thought of sending the note by another hand. He sent privately an unsigned copy of the letter to Sir Douglas Haig on February 8th, but either through policy or oversight held back the original. His mind was on something which excited him much more. In England he stayed watching with an avid but anxious heart the progress of the struggle between the C.I.G.S. and the War Cabinet. The official note was completely overlooked. When he remembered, or was reminded of it, he sent the official note on to Haig. During the time the Cabinet were fighting their way through the crisis Sir Henry Wilson never called their attention to the dangerous delays in the formation of the Reserve and to the intrigues that were going on to frustrate the plan together.

Haig only received his Official Memorandum from Versailles on the 27th February. Clemenceau paid a visit to Haig's Headquarters on the 26th February and subsequently told Poincaré that the English Commander-in-Chief had informed him that "he did not want to carry out the Versailles decisions." Haig seems to have also told Clemenceau that "he had already informed Lloyd George that he would never give up his reserve divisions to form a reserve army—that he would rather resign." He made an exception of the two British divisions returning from Italy. I have no note of any such conversation. I had only seen Haig on the 9th and the 13th February. The official Versailles Note on the reserves

*Haig
determined to
oppose plan*

had not then reached him, although as I say he had been unofficially informed about its contents. Had I been aware of his attitude I should most certainly have laid so startling a fact before the Cabinet and I certainly would have imparted it to Milner, who was our civil representative on the Versailles Council. There is nothing in the War Cabinet Minutes on the point, and the letters I received from Milner at this date contain no reference to it. Wilson notes in his Diary that on February 25th, Haig "flatly refused" to earmark any divisions for the General Reserve. But that refusal was not conveyed to me at the time. I have already recorded the only reference Haig made to the matter. That was in the conversation I had with him on the 14th. So far was he then from threatening to resign that Haig informed Wilson that his duty was to obey the orders of the Government, as it was for the Cabinet to decide. The conversation to which Clemenceau refers was never passed on to me.

Haig's reply was given on March 2nd. By that date there were unmistakable indications that the attack was coming on the British Front.

*His reply
to note* The Cabinet received the official intimation of Haig's decision on the 6th March. In it he said :—

" . . . I have to make the following observations : An enemy offensive appears imminent on both the English and French Fronts. To meet this attack I have already disposed of all the troops at present under my command, and if I were to earmark six or seven divisions from these troops the whole of my plans and dispositions would have to be remodelled. This is clearly impossible, and I therefore regret

that I am unable to comply with the suggestion conveyed in the Note."

(That is exactly what the course of the battle forced him to do.)

He then added :—

"To meet any emergency in the Franco-British Front I have arranged as a preliminary measure with the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies for all preparations to be made for the rapid dispatch of a force of from six to eight British divisions with a proportionate amount of artillery and subsidiary services to his assistance. General Pétain has made similar arrangements for relief or intervention of French troops on the British Front. These arrangements, both French and British, are now being contemplated and zones of concentration opposite those fronts which are most vulnerable and likely to be attacked are being provided."

Subsequent events prove how vague, loose and dilatory these arrangements were when they were put to the test, and they had the fatal flaw that indefinite promises had to be interpreted not by the terms of an agreement, but by decisions taken at the time by two men whose views of the military situation, and to a certain extent, whose interests, were in conflict.

The C.I.G.S. himself realised the danger of Haig's decision, for he wrote on March 6th to the Secretary of State for War in the following terms :—

*Wilson's
warning*

"S. of S.

I much regret the attitude taken up by the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief.

He admits, indeed he claims, that an enemy offensive is imminent on both the British and French Fronts, and yet either because he 'foresees a wider employment, etc., of Allied Reserves than that foreshadowed in the Joint Note'—a remark which I confess I do not understand—or because he considers the General Reserve 'could not be earmarked or located, etc....' which again I entirely fail to comprehend, seeing that every Reserve formation always is and always must be both earmarked and located—he declines to comply with the suggestion made to him by the Executive Committee at Versailles on the orders received from the Supreme Council.

Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig is taking a grave responsibility in so acting, for both the other Commanders-in-Chief (Generals Pétain and Diaz) have agreed to allot divisions—General Pétain giving eight and General Diaz six divisions. But apart from this, the Field-Marshal is taking a grave responsibility, because if he is heavily engaged and unable single-handed to withstand the attack, he will find himself living on the charity of the French Commander-in-Chief who may be unwilling or unable to help.

At the same time, I am strongly of opinion that no pressure should be put on the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief at the present moment to make him conform to the action of our Allies.

HENRY WILSON,

C.I.G.S.

6th March, 1918."

This document was not communicated to the Cabinet at the time either by Sir Henry Wilson

himself or by the Secretary of State to whom it was addressed. By writing to the Secretary of State, Wilson protected himself from the charge of condoning Haig's flagrant disobedience. By giving the advice to leave Haig alone, and omitting to communicate with the War Cabinet, he did in fact condone it : he thus retained the favour of Haig, which he always sought so zealously : at the same time he did not forfeit the favour of the War Cabinet, which he had gained so adroitly. In fact, he faced both ways, as usual. On March 6th I received from General Rawlinson, the head of the British Mission at Versailles, the following official intimation :—

“ . . . The Supreme War Council at its session of 2nd February, in presence of Commanders-in-Chief of French and British Armies and of Italian Minister of War decided upon creation of an Inter-Allied General Reserve and delegated to Executive War Board its powers in all that concerned the constitution, the positions, and use of its reserve.

Versailles announces Haig's refusal

The Executive War Board in its sitting of 6th February drew up a joint letter to Commander-in-Chief making certain proposals with regard to constitution and position of the General Reserve.

By a written and verbal communication between General Foch and General Pétain an agreement with French Commander-in-Chief was reached on 19th February.

By a written communication between General Giardino and General Diaz an agreement with

Italian Commander-in-Chief was reached on 2nd March.

In his letter of 2nd March the Field-Marshal Commander-in-Chief of the British Army states that he regrets that he is unable to comply with the request contained in the joint note of the Executive War Board.

Under the circumstances of the joint note the Executive finds itself unable to continue its work and therefore unable to organise the Inter-Allied General Reserve, as the Supreme War Council, at its sitting of 2nd February, had instructed it to do; and Joint Note of the Executive decides that each military representative shall so inform his own Government and ask for instructions."

It is evident from the terms of this resolution, that the Executive Board was still under the impression that Pétain stood by his offer of eight divisions. Sir Henry Wilson was also under the same impression. Foch and his colleagues had been kept as much in the dark as we were. They did not know Pétain's change of mind and how he was receiving not merely the acquiescence of Clemenceau but a considerable measure of encouragement from him in his obduracy. The Resolution passed by the Board indicated that in their opinion the scheme of a General Reserve had been destroyed by Haig's refusal and that in the absence of further instructions from their respective Governments it was useless to proceed any further with it. Had the Cabinet only had to deal with their own Commander-in-Chief the difficulty would have been overcome. But we were soon to ascertain that we had also to deal with two very formidable

persons who were not amenable to persuasion, and to whom we could issue no instructions : the French Prime Minister and his Commander-in-Chief, General Pétain. The whole scheme had to be recast and re-conferred and re-argued. There was no time for all this. We had to make the best of a bad job.

Haig's refusal was discussed in the War Cabinet from the point of view of Haig's special difficulties now that it was known that the first *Attitude of War Cabinet* impact of the German offensive would be on his line. We felt, however, that this was all the more reason why the French and the Italians should contribute their quota. The Italians at Versailles had shown every readiness to send even 11 divisions to France. Since then they had reduced their offer to four. Haig, however, preferred to have two of his own divisions back. But the Italians, now that they knew the clouds were not gathering over the Julian Alps but above the fields of Picardy, would, we felt certain, release a few more divisions. We therefore suggested to Clemenceau that the Supreme Council should be summoned immediately to meet in London.

At this date we had not been informed that Pétain's attitude was equally recalcitrant and that he had threatened to resign rather than place his *Foch's reputation* reserve under Foch. Nor had we been told that Clemenceau had also changed his mind and was no longer in favour of an army of manœuvre under Foch. The appointment of Foch seems to have been the reef on which the scheme was wrecked. Pétain would not submit to his command of the General Reserve. He felt it

was a reflexion on his own authority if arrangements were made practically for putting the general conduct of a great battle under another General. I was informed subsequently that our G.H.Q. had a poor opinion of Foch and his capacity for such an exalted and responsible position. They did not conceal their contempt for the old soldier. A man who could explain himself clearly must necessarily be shallow and garrulous. To be able to speak lucidly and fluently was bad enough ; but he also spoke dramatically. Foch was a Gascon by birth and Latin exuberance seems as much a sign of folly to the Anglo-Saxon as insular reserve seems a sign of stupidity to the Latin. He was just a stage Frenchman to be mimicked and laughed over. He was referred to in high military quarters as that "old dotard Foch." How brilliant soever had been his past career, they were convinced that his best work was done and, judging by the comments made in Staff circles, he was treated as a has-been with nothing left but a blustering manner which they thought deluded politicians into the belief that he was a strong man. It was only those mad and muddling politicians who would ever dream of putting the reserves of the British Army in a great battle under such a commander. It may be thought that I am giving a burlesque account of what happened behind the scenes to destroy the scheme of a General Reserve ; but those who heard the conversations in elevated military circles about Foch will not be in the least surprised.

But most fatal of all Foch's critics—I might say adversaries—was Clemenceau. Foch was a devout Catholic. There were many nominal Catholics in high command in the French Army. But they

never obtruded their attachment to the Roman Church on the attention of their associates. They were not even practising Catholics. The governing party in France was and had for a long time been anti-clerical. The threat to the existence of the Republic in the days of Boulanger and of the Dreyfus affair had come from the clericalists in the Army, trained in clerical schools, received and petted in clericalist society. Clemenceau was the most inexorable of all the anti-clericals. His life had been spent in fighting the influence of the Church. He would never enter a church. His refusal when he paid a visit to Strasbourg after the Armistice to attend a celebration of the liberation of Alsace in that glorious cathedral lost him the presidentship of the Republic when he was the most popular and powerful man in France. Foch was not only himself an ardent Churchman, his brother was a bishop. Clemenceau had a deep distrust of all Catholic Generals. He disliked placing power in their hands. He never knew to what use they would turn their power. The spiritual antipathy between these two remarkable men developed in the course of the ensuing months into personal antagonism which was unpleasant to all those who took part in conferences with them. There is nothing more disagreeable in council than to witness the clashing hatreds of two strong personalities. The more Clemenceau pondered over the Versailles plan of a General Reserve under this clericalist soldier, the less he cared for it. There was another motive in explanation of Clemenceau's change of mind on the question of the General Reserve. Poincaré ascribes to Clemenceau the ambition of himself becoming the

*Clemenceau's
prejudice
against Foch*

*Clemenceau
wants to be
Generalissimo*

virtual Generalissimo of all the Allied Armies in every theatre of war.* Poincaré and Clemenceau were mutually antipathetic. I would have hesitated to accept Poincaré's suspicions as to Clemenceau's motives when Clemenceau threw over the scheme which placed Foch in the powerful position of Controller of the Allied Reserves and I would not have thought these suspicions worthy of quotation, had it not been that they are confirmed by another witness of undoubted authority. General René Tournès, in his able and on the whole well-documented book on the 1918 campaign, says, in commenting on another conflict between the ideas of Foch and Pétain when Clemenceau intervened, that he was "swayed by a vague whim to wield the military command of the Coalition which he revealed almost as soon as he was in power."† This may explain the somewhat ill-natured observation made by Clemenceau to Foch immediately after the signature of the Doullens Agreement: "Well, you've got the job you so much wanted!" There is a suspicion of

* cf. for example, Clemenceau's words during a visit to Poincaré on February 22nd, 1918:—

"... We spoke of the difficulties which had arisen between Foch and Pétain. 'I shall settle that business,' he assured me. 'The organisation of the army of manœuvre is hardly defensible as it stands. *But I shall be there.* In the hour of attack I shall be on the spot. If there's a clash, I shall be the one to adjust it, provided I'm still in power.'"

(Raymond Poincaré: "Victoire et armistice 1918," p. 58), and again, Poincaré's account of Freycinet's opinion expressed on February 23rd, 1918:—

"... In the afternoon Freycinet arrived, still much preoccupied with the relations between Foch and Pétain, as well as the command of the Reserve Army. I told him that Clemenceau was certainly banking on acting as arbitrator in emergency. 'But,' he replied, 'Clemenceau cannot ever be sure of being there at the decisive moment. And besides, it's doubtful whether our Allies will leave the power of deciding the fate of an inter-Allied Army to a French politician.'"

(*ibid.*, p. 60.) (My italics.)

† General René Tournès: "Foch et la victoire des Alliés" (Vol. IV of the "Histoire de la guerre mondiale"), p. 156.

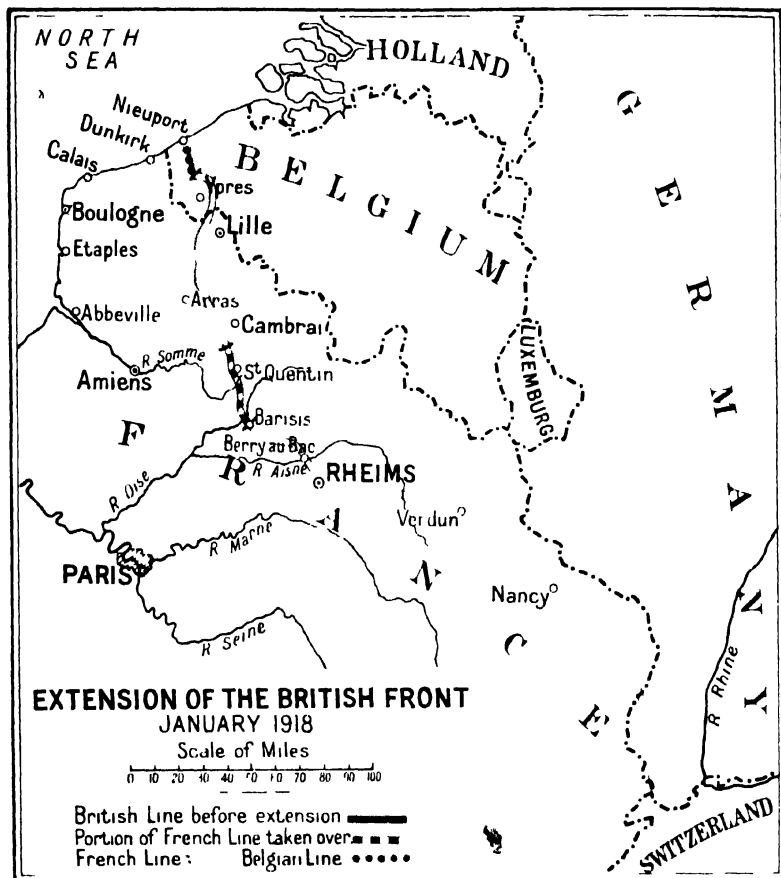
pique in that comment, especially coming from the man who a few weeks before this incident had intimated his intention to get rid of Foch altogether. If Clemenceau ever harboured such an aspiration it would have inclined him towards Pétain rather than the dominating and dynamic Foch. Pétain shrank from bold decisions and would have been more disposed than Foch to leave the responsibility for taking them to the head of the Government. Whatever the motives that prompted Clemenceau's growing disinclination to confer supreme control on Foch, both Pétain and Haig soon realised its existence and took full advantage of it. Pétain was a cautious man—very cautious—so at first he confined his objection to an effort to cut down the contribution he had to make to the General Reserve. Why not eight Divisions, instead of thirteen? That was all he could spare. But he gradually grew bolder when he saw that Clemenceau did not strike him down with the lightnings of his wrath. At last he mustered enough courage to resist the whole idea

*Pétain refuses
to supply
divisions*

of parting with any of his divisions in order to place them under Foch's direction. Poincaré states that he threatened to resign if the Government insisted on his doing so. Clemenceau was easily won over. He told Poincaré on February 22nd (Memoirs) that "the organisation of a field army (i.e., the army of manoeuvre) was not at all defensible in itself." By that date Clemenceau's prejudices and prepossessions had been roused and rallied to the side of the Commanders-in-Chief who would not have Foch. When Clemenceau after his visit to Haig's G.H.Q. on the 26th repeated to the President what Haig had told him, he withheld from his Chief what he had told Haig.

According to the Official History, Clemenceau told Haig that he gradually meant to *écarter* Foch. The two probably interchanged confidences about the distinguished but unwanted General and found that on this subject they were, from different motives, entirely in sympathy. At that interview the Reserve plan was finally put out of existence. Clemenceau called on Poincaré on the afternoon of his visit to Haig and told him that he had seen Pétain, who had again expressed his anxiety about the Reserve Army. Clemenceau said he had "reassured him." Then he added, "And for the rest events will arrange themselves. *The divisions of Versailles have ceased to be.*" It was after the "reassuring" talk with Pétain that Clemenceau visited Haig's Headquarters. When we bear that fact in mind we can understand better the character of the conversation that took place between Haig and Clemenceau. Haig knew then where he stood and that he could throw over the whole of the Versailles scheme without any fear of untoward happenings. Even the careful Pétain took a decision. On the 28th he reports to Poincaré that he is "very satisfied with his conversation with Clemenceau. The reserve army *a vécu.*" It was dead—but only for a short while, for a much shorter while than anyone then anticipated. These conversations were not four weeks distant from the day—a day of muddle and of disaster—when the despised Foch was called by the united voices of the men—Clemenceau, Haig and Pétain—who had thrown over him and his plans as things of no worth, to save the Allies from the calamity into which they had blundered.

Not one of these vital conversations which Clemenceau had with Haig, Pétain and Poincaré was



ever communicated to me or to any other member of the War Cabinet. I knew that Haig was obdurate and that Pétain was difficult, but I knew nothing of the encouragement which had been given to them by Clemenceau.

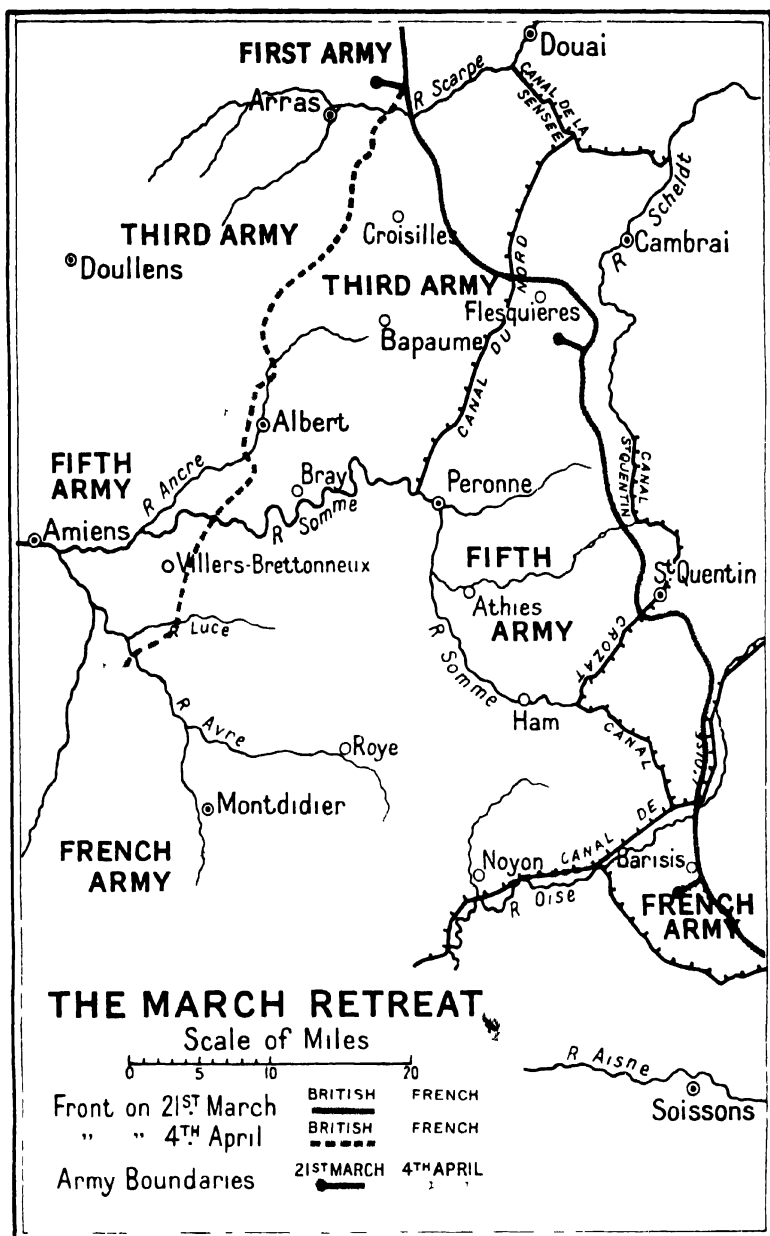
Before the Supreme Council met in London on March 14th the fate of the General Reserve had already been settled. I ascertained *General Reserve* enough about the position to understand *scheme killed* : that before our first sitting. *Foch's protest* General Bliss, who was an unswerving advocate of the policy of the army of manœuvre under Foch, was just as convinced as I was that it was impossible to revive it without provoking a controversy in which Britain, France and America would be at cross-purposes. The battle was a few days off. This was no time for another crisis. It had cost nearly three weeks to dispose of the Robertson controversy. This dispute would have involved a much more serious conflict, for Clemenceau, Haig and Pétain would all have been ranged against the British War Cabinet. We had to make the best of an unsatisfactory situation. Haig assured me before the meeting, as Pétain had already assured Clemenceau, that the most detailed arrangements had been perfected for the co-operation of the two armies in the coming battle. With that assurance I had to be satisfied. Bliss, Orlando and I expressed a hope that as the fight developed it might still be possible to organise a General Reserve on the lines of the Versailles scheme. Foch, however, knowing the magnitude of the risk that was being run, entered an angry protest. He complained that the experts of the Supreme Council had been completely ignored, and that they had not even been informed of the

character of the arrangements which, it was alleged, had been made by the two Commanders-in-Chief, to throw their reserves into the battle line and to come to each other's aid. Clemenceau lost his temper and rudely told Foch to "Shut up." Foch's only reply was, "I cannot hold myself responsible for what will happen." Clemenceau retorted by taunting the Versailles Board with their failure to carry out the Resolution of the Supreme Council which had been proposed by me and accepted by Orlando, to arrange for bringing eleven Italian divisions to France. Foch's answer was complete. He said that that was an essential part of the formation of a General Reserve. These divisions were to be Italy's contribution. When the General Reserve was shelved by France and Britain they could not ask Italy to be the sole contributors. The demand made by Versailles on the Italian Army had therefore to be dropped.

The attack on our lines by Germany's gigantic army had thus to be faced without putting the defences of the attacked front in order, because our labour was diverted to work-
Disaster for
spring
campaign ing on a salient admitted to be indefensible, and because numbers of divisions were put into the line and invaluable reserves were massed in support of favoured sectors which were not threatened with any immediate danger. We were also without any General Reserve to support the sector attacked by the enemy and deprived of the Italian reinforcements which would have been invaluable in filling up gaps on our weak Fifth Army Front. Haig, as we have seen, had a poor opinion of the Italian infantry. He had preferred two British to four Italian Divisions. But even assuming

that he was right in his estimate of their quality—and here I venture respectfully to disagree with his estimate—they could have held the unassailed parts of our own or the French Front and thus released more seasoned troops for the battle line. It was soon to become evident that we had no sufficient working arrangement for co-operation between the British and French Armies. Had these matters been attended to, the German attacks could have been repelled with such devastating losses that any hope of their renewal would have been abandoned and a satisfactory peace might have been reached without having to wade through the terrible slaughter of another summer and autumn campaign. But the G.H.Q.'s decreed otherwise and at this stage there was neither the time nor the allied unity which was essential for any attempt on so formidable a resistance. Wrangles and recriminations between Foch and Clemenceau were futile to save the situation. I therefore refrained from prolonging this rasping quarrel between these two great Frenchmen. There was a suggestion that we should save our faces by setting up some simulacrum of a General Reserve. I dislike participating in shams. A reserve army without real divisions would have been nothing more. The soldiers had once more defeated the politicians and there were rejoicings amongst the Headquarter Generals, their Staffs and adherents. They had beaten off triumphantly all assaults on their positions. Both strategy and tactics in intrigue were masterly. Alas that these gifts were so much less effective when directed against the foe they were engaged to fight ! The nation and the poor fighting soldiers of the Fifth and Third Armies had to pay dearly for these brass-hat triumphs. It is one of the ironies of

political warfare that the men subsequently attacked in Parliament for the inevitable results of these errors of judgment were not the real delinquents, but the men who strove hard to save the Army from the effects of their delinquency. The perpetrators of the calamitous mistakes which left the Fifth Army to be overwhelmed through sketchy defences and inadequate reserves were not only excused but lauded, and according to precedent ultimately rewarded.



CHAPTER LXXVIII

THE MARCH RETREAT

As the battle approached, there is nothing that struck me more at the time, and even now when looking back upon it, than the kind of composure, amounting almost to supineness, which reigned amongst those who would have the most direct and terrible responsibility for the lives of myriads and the fate of nations when the struggle commenced. On the German side all leave had been stopped for some weeks before the battle. On ours it went on as usual. The strength of our divisions was substantially reduced by men home on leave. It is difficult to understand this confident demeanour in such circumstances. After the battles of the Somme, of the Scarpe, and more particularly of Flanders, the military nerve ceased to respond to the memory of past horror or the prospect of future ghastliness. The deadening effect of prolonged war upon the susceptibilities seemed to blunt the sense of responsibility in matters great and small. I have already shown how tardily the military leaders moved in the improvement of the defences, in the arrangements of the troops, in the disposition of the reserves. When danger was imminent, when it was known where it would fall, there was little quickening of movement at G.H.Q., not much hurry or hustle to see that no

precautions had been omitted, or preparation overlooked, or contingency unthought of. There were two episodes, seemingly small in comparison with the immensity of the rapidly approaching portent, but significant of this attitude of irresponsibility.

It is the supreme duty of any man who is at the head of a concern, to choose his subordinates without reference to personal likes or dislikes, but entirely on their qualifications for the post. Many of the mistakes committed in war, in business and in politics, are due to a friendly desire to give a lift to men who are not qualified for a position to which they are elevated. It seemed to me that Haig was governed in his choice of men far too much by his desire to have around him those who were personally agreeable to himself, and who would not clash with his dictatorial temper by suggesting any difference of opinion.

There were two appointments made during the period of preparation for the conflict by the Commander-in-Chief which illustrate this cardinal defect. The first was the advancement of a divisional General, inconspicuous for achievement and not endowed with any exceptional ability, to the all-important post of Chief of the General Staff. The C.G.S. was the principal adviser of the Commander-in-Chief on all questions affecting strategy and tactics. With an army of over two million men holding a line of over 100 miles against the most formidable warriors in the world, it was essential that the Commander-in-Chief should have at his elbow the best strategist in the Army, in training, in experience and in intellect. There were men in the British Army who possessed these attributes in a high degree. Sir Douglas Haig overlooked them all, and

*Haig's
dubious Staff
appointments*

appointed Sir Herbert Lawrence. He was a cavalry officer who held a very subordinate command in the Boer War but who had been in the same regiment as Haig. He there, no doubt, conducted himself with all the gallantry and dash one would expect from a British soldier in the task of chasing elusive Boers across the African veldt with indifferent horses and horsemen. As soon as the South African War was over he retired from the Army and threw himself into finance. After 15 years behind a city desk, he volunteered for the Great War. He acquired some experience of trench warfare in resisting sporadic Turkish attacks, supported by light artillery and inadequate ammunition, on the Gallipoli Peninsula. He came to France only in 1917. He was given a divisional command, and did his duty without distinction.

General Kiggell was retired from the post of C.G.S. in January, 1918, and suddenly Lawrence was promoted to the most important and responsible position in the Army, next to that of the Commander-in-Chief, and that at the most difficult and critical stage of the War. As far as the British Army was concerned he became the opposite number of Ludendorff, one of the two, or possibly three, most brilliant Staff officers on either side in the whole War. Nothing but genius of the highest order could merit or justify such dazzling promotion with such scant experience. Not the warmest, or the most charitable amongst Lawrence's friends—and as he possesses an amiable disposition and an attractive personality he must have attached to himself a great many friends—would claim that he possessed military genius of that or any other order. It is not the only action or omission of

*Lawrence
becomes
C.G.S.*

Haig's in this crisis which forces one to ask : Why did he do it ?

Here is another episode. The Fifth Army was given the task of defending the part of the line where it became clear to all those who studied the symptoms that the attack was most likely to come. The defences were insufficient and the numbers of the defenders quite inadequate to such a task. Haig ought to have appointed his very best officers to command troops that were likely to be attacked under such conditions. A few weeks before the battle he removed a General who was in command of one of the army corps in that area. By every canon of prudent leadership he ought to have chosen the best man available as his successor. But he had at Headquarters a favourite

Butler's time had not had an opportunity of
promotion commanding troops in the field at all.

Haig thought this was Butler's opportunity. Surely this was the last choice he ought to have made. It was unfair to Butler himself. It was not fair to Gough. It was most unfair of all to the troops who were thus doomed to fight against enormous odds under a callow leader. Butler was a pleasant fellow with a forbidding frown, cultivated on the Robertson model of countenance. It was supposed to give an impression of calm and ruthless strength. It was not such a success as Robertson's and there was nothing like as much behind it. Butler was not devoid of intelligence but he had not that kind of brain that triumphs over inexperience in difficult situations.

I am not certain that the best commander of an army corps placed in Butler's unfortunate position would have altogether succeeded. But one never

knows what a really tried and skilful leader will do in the worst conditions. As to Lawrence's appointment I have always had a feeling that an able soldier of exceptional intelligence equipped with a thorough knowledge of the problems of warfare on the Western Front, and possessing the adequate independence of character to give the best advice to his Chief without reference to his palate, would have averted some of the most serious blunders which landed us in the defeats of March and April.

And now after all these misunderstandings, mistakes and negligences came the most stupendous battle ever fought on this earth. Three of the mightiest nations of the world were putting the last throb of their strength into a struggle which lasted without cease for months and into which they cast the millions which remained of their young manhood. Highly competent observers and students of this vast and deadly combat have written of its many fluctuations. I shall put down what I can recall with the aid of contemporary documents of how it appeared to one who witnessed its course from his seat at the head of the Government which had the supreme direction of the affairs of this country during these strenuous and anxious months.

On March 13th, the Director of Military Operations, Sir Frederick Maurice, reported to the Cabinet the appearance of the Brandenburg Corps in reserve south of Lille, but said that it made no difference in the total number of enemy divisions, which remained at 186. He informed us that this gave an approximate total of enemy rifle strength of 1,370,000 men and an artillery strength of 15,700 guns, while the total Allied rifle strength on the Western Front

*Enemy
concentration*

numbered 1,500,000 infantry and 16,600 guns. The average strength of the British divisions was larger than that of the German divisions.* This report of March 13th was given to us the day before the meeting of the Supreme War Council in London to which I have already referred. The only further report as to numbers came on March 19th, when it was said that another 400 enemy guns had been located and two more German divisions. Even with this addition there was a definite superiority on the Allied side in both guns and men. But although slightly inferior in numbers, the Germans had managed to mass enormous forces behind the line of attack. That is why Foch was so anxious to build up a General Reserve of French and British divisions behind the threatened sectors.

When the War Cabinet met for its usual morning sitting on the 21st of March, it was informed by the

*First reports
of battle* C.I.G.S. that the Germans had commenced a heavy bombardment before dawn on a front of 80 kilometres, from the Scarpe to the Oise, and that this front

of attack was in general accord with the one anticipated by the British Staff at Versailles. The news that arrived in the course of the day was very confused and gave us no clear idea of what had happened in the fighting. But there was nothing in the reports recorded to excite alarm. When we met the following morning, i.e., the 22nd of March, the information conveyed to us by the C.I.G.S. on reports from G.H.Q. was not much more definite. There was the usual *communiqué* to which we had been accustomed, about "very heavy enemy casualties" but no particulars as to our own, and Sir Henry

* The number of battalions in the Dominion troops had not been cut down.

Wilson ended his statement by informing us that "the information received up to now gave no cause for anxiety." The Cabinet was anxious to have all the latest intelligence as to the comparative strength of the forces engaged on both sides together with the reserves. This he promised to have prepared. He was of the opinion that the attack would develop into a long-drawn-out battle, deliberately intended for a trial of strength, in order that a decisive result might be arrived at. Nothing reached the War Office during this second day of the battle to modify the reports which had been communicated to us in the morning.

By March 23rd the news from G.H.Q. was not as reassuring as that which we had received the previous two days. It was reported that on the Fifth Army Front the enemy had succeeded in penetrating our battle zone and reserve lines, and that a retirement had in consequence been made to the line of the Somme. A more serious indication of the state of affairs came with the report that our casualties were 40,000 and that not less than 600 guns had been lost. Even then there were reassuring items in the report. On the Third Army Front we were told that the enemy had in the main been held firmly in the battle zone except at Mory, and enormous slaughter had undoubtedly been inflicted on the enemy in places.

I had a feeling that the position was much graver than the G.H.Q. messages would imply. It looked as if Gough's tired army was giving way before the fierce onrush of the German hordes. It was evident that our line was broken and that we were relying upon patchwork defences hastily improvised to stop a

*My
apprehensions*

victorious army. The news that all the reserves of the Fifth Army had been already thrown in was disconcerting. A report of Haig's visiting Pétain to persuade him to take over a part of the battle front was certainly disquieting. It showed that the vaunted arrangement between Haig and Pétain to help each other in the day of trouble had failed to function, and that even on the third day of the battle it was bringing no real reinforcement to troops which were fighting desperately against odds of three to one.

I always worked early in the morning and I received the battle news at the earliest available hour. I gathered on that Saturday morning that the War Office seemed to be either bewildered or stunned by the reports. I therefore decided to postpone the

Cabinet and to take matters in hand at the War Office itself. I invited the Staff *Conference at War Office* to meet me there in order to see what could be done to throw all available reinforcements into France with the greatest attainable celerity. The first thing to ascertain was what troops we had in this country, the next what we could spare and then how many per day we could send across the Channel. I instructed the Adjutant-General to have the figures ready as to troops in this country. To help us as to transport I asked the Shipping Controller to meet me before I went to the War Office, and explained to him the emergency and the importance of getting across as many men as he could carry in the shortest space of time. He promised to go into the question and find how many ships he could lay his hands on for that purpose.

At the conference I summoned at the War Office, Major-General Sir Robert Hutchison (now Lord Hutchison), the Director of Organisation, was prepared

with figures as to trained men in the country who were immediately available for drafts. I found him prompt, efficient and reliable. We were informed by him that there were 170,000 who were ready to be moved at once to France as fast as there was transport capacity. This included 50,000 trained youths between 18½ and 19 years of age. A pledge had been given in Parliament that youths under 19 years old should not be sent overseas unless there was a national emergency. We decided that such an emergency had now arisen. The Germans had already incorporated a considerable number of their 18-year-olds in their divisions at the front. On further investigation the figure of the numbers of men available for drafting to France rose to over 212,000 by the 20th of April. We were astonished to ascertain that there were 88,000 men on the establishment in France who were on leave in this country. The Germans had already stopped all leave some weeks before the attack. When an attack was expected any day on our front it struck me that the absence of so many men from their battalions required some explanation. When an offensive was anticipated on our side leave was always postponed. Eighty-eight thousand men absent from their battalions would mean that each of the divisions in France would be short of its full strength, that is, by several hundreds per division. On that basis, the Fifth Army would have over 10,000 of their men on leave on the day of the battle. No wonder Gough complained that some of the battalions were not up to strength! In addition to the above there were 30,000 men in depots in France and the Dominions had another 10,000 in this country and in France.

The next step was to take measures to transport the drafts to France. In practice it had been found possible to carry across 8,000 a day. After another conference with Sir Joseph Maclay I found he could scrape together the necessary shipping to take over to France 20,000, working up to 30,000 a day.

With the divisions it had already been arranged before the battle commenced to bring over from Italy, and divisions promised by the
Reinforcements from Egypt Italians, the present and prospective losses in the battle were thus more than made up.

To give further confidence to our Army we decided to bring over at once from Egypt the men from the three divisions which it had already been arranged should be filled up by Indian troops.

Total Allied forces in the Turkish theatres (Palestine and Mesopotamia) were as six to five of the enemy forces, according to the War Office estimates given to the Man-power Committee. As a matter of fact our superiority was nearer two to one. Indian divisions could, at any time after the conquest of Baghdad and the overthrow of the Turkish Army in that country, have been brought to Palestine and thus released several divisions for France. But here again to do so would have meant telling the full tale of Turkish disintegration to these mischievous politicians at home. There was the real enemy upon which great soldiers had to concentrate their subtlest arts and wiles. In this emergency we decided to do at once what ought to have been done by the Staff months ago—bring British divisions from Egypt to France and replace them by Indian divisions that were not wanted in Mesopotamia. This reconstruction had in fact already been ordered weeks before the Battle of Amiens.

In going through all this process at the War Office I realised how the struggles between Versailles and the Chief of the Staff had diverted the minds of those who were directing the organisation and distribution of our forces from their primary and urgent duties. There is nothing half as absorbing of time, thought and energy as a quarrel between professional factions engaged in bitter rivalry. The Italian, Mesopotamian and Palestine arrangements ought to have been put through in time to reinforce our Army in France long before the German offensive was due.

*Price of
political
distractions*

I called a Cabinet Meeting in the afternoon of Saturday, March 23rd, at the War Office to consider the situation and to sanction the measures taken at the morning conference in view of the less favourable reports from the front. The Cabinet were given such information as to the course of the battle as had been received during the day from G.H.Q. There was some discussion about the French tardiness in helping us. It was stated that Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig had gone that day to meet General Pétain with a view to arranging that the French should take over more line. Wilson thought it better not to tell us that the telegram from Haig said that "the situation was serious." It was the first communication from G.H.Q. that displayed any real appreciation of the gravity of the position. Haig also informed Wilson that the arrangements for the French to come and take over the line of the Somme would not be completed till the 29th (the ninth day of the battle). Nor did Wilson repeat accurately what Haig had said about seeing Pétain. "I am going to meet Pétain to-night," was the actual phrase.

*Cabinet
discussions*

A question was raised as to whether it was necessary to put any political pressure on the French Government to render us the necessary assistance, and a suggestion was made that either Milner or myself should go immediately to Paris for that purpose. However, it was thought by the C.I.G.S. and his Staff undesirable for Ministers to interfere between the Generals unless and until it was found that Haig and Pétain could not adjust matters between themselves, so it was decided to wait until the result of Haig's conference with Pétain was known. In the course of the discussion which took place, I pointed out that if the Versailles scheme for the constitution and control of the Allied General Reserve had only been brought into full operation, it would not have been necessary to have this bargaining with the French in the middle of a battle, but that the Executive War Board would have decided immediately where the large reserves at their disposal could have been thrown in to the best advantage for checking the enemy advance. It so happens that we know exactly what would have taken place if the plan of the General Reserve had been persisted in. Great Commanders usually keep their plans to themselves, but on this occasion the great Commander was President of a Board, and was thus compelled to disclose his ideas. Two of the Controlling Board only understood English, and Foch's French had to be translated: the interpreter, who was also the Secretary, was thus compelled to learn Foch's plans. He has put them on record.

Foch in effect said to the Executive War Board "Ludendorff must launch his mass of attack either eastward or southward, either towards the British side of the angle in the Cambrai region, or towards

the French side of the angle and the Rheims region. But if he is successful, and drives one or other of these lines back, he himself presents an unguarded and open flank : and the more successful he is and the more he enlarges the angle, the longer and therefore the more open and unguarded his flank will be.

“ I will, therefore, divide my General Reserve into three portions, of different sizes. The smallest portion I will place in Dauphiné, close to the best crossing into Italy ; the largest I will concentrate round Paris ; the third portion I will place round Amiens.”

This is the disposition Foch intended to make of the General Reserve in February. As it became increasingly evident that the attack was to be made on the British Front, Foch would have moved more of his reserves into the Amiens area. It will be observed that Gough would thus have had 20 to 25 divisions ready to help him.

At the meeting of the War Cabinet held on Saturday afternoon—the third day of the battle—the Director of Military Intelligence, General Macdonogh, and the Director of Military Operations, Sir Frederick Maurice, supplied the latest figures of comparison between the enemy and Allied forces. They now increased the numbers of the German rifle strength to 1,402,800 and reduced the Allied numbers to 1,418,000 ; still a slight superiority, it will be observed, for the Allies. The comment of the C.I.G.S. upon this estimate was that he considered that for purposes of calculation, the present forces might be reckoned as approximately equal. This observation did not make any allowance for the mechanical superiority of the Allies.

*Statistics of
comparative
strength*

Those who were on leave in England were counted in the estimate given two or three days before, as if they were in France. I believe the numbers actually in France at the date of the commencement of the battle were alone included in the second reckoning. If so, that may partially explain the disparity between the two estimates.

After disposing of the more pressing questions of sending immediate reinforcements to France, we turned our attention to searching out the ways and means of replenishing our reserves of men available for the front in the event of the War going on into the winter of 1918, and the spring of 1919. Here we were not so successful. There were only two sources available—the combing out of essential men in vital industries and the conscription of Ireland. The latter I agreed to much against my better judgment, by a pressure which came from many quarters at home and in France. But that part of the story I must postpone. On the whole we did an excellent morning's work and the machinery we set in motion for dealing with the immediate crisis worked without a hitch.

The same evening—the 23rd—the reports from France not improving, I decided that either Milner or myself must go over at once to see why and where the arrangements for mutual help had failed to operate and whether things could not be set right before possible disaster supervened. I sent for Milner and discussed the whole situation with him. We both felt that there was only one effective thing to do and that was to put Foch in control of both armies. We both agreed that if there had been in existence a General Reserve of 30 divisions under the independent

*Further
recruiting
measures*

*Milner sent
to France to
secure Allied
co-operation*

control of a Commander with Foch's gift of lightning decision, enough reinforcements would already have been thrown in to restore the line. As soon as the news reached the Executive Board that the German concentration was taking place between Arras and the Oise, most of the reserves would have been moved into that area and a sufficient number would have been moved so close up to the line that they could have gone into action by the evening of the first day, certainly by the morning of the second. Instead of which we had all this manœuvring between Haig and Pétain as to which of them ought to rush in first with his reserves, and as to whether Pétain ought not to take over entirely part of the British line and if so when. We were informed that there was a question as to whether Haig's forces should not fall towards the north and Pétain's towards Paris, leaving a fatal gap between the British and French Armies. Had the General Reserve of 30 divisions been in existence there could have been no gap unless this formidable reserve were beaten. Pétain maintained that until the battle had fully developed he could not be certain that the Germans would not attack his front in the Champagne district where they had gathered considerable reserves. If they did so, Pétain said he might find his own reserves entangled in another battle. He was all for "Wait and See" before committing too many of his reserves to the Somme battle. On the other hand, Haig had most of the British troops which were available for reinforcement placed at the other extreme of his line. It would take a long time to move them. So the argument went on. They did not argue together face to face as they ought to have done. They conferred with their respective Staffs, each in his own

Headquarters where they were all agreed that it was for the other wing to flutter first. Meanwhile the valiant soldiers of the Fifth Army were perishing for want of help from one or other of these exalted interpreters of a compact lacking precision. It was a deplorable outcome for the "complete and detailed arrangements" that were to "move quickly."

The news that had reached the War Office by the evening of the 23rd showed that this description was not mere conjecture on Milner's part or mine. And the facts, as we subsequently discovered, were an understatement of the muddle. It was therefore decided that nothing would put an end to this calamitous manœuvring but the direct intervention of the meddling politicians.

Accordingly we agreed that Milner should at once leave for Paris to see Clemenceau. We thought it

*Instructed to
get Foch
appointed* better that I should remain in London to direct the plans I had made for the rapid dispatch of reinforcements to France so that there should be no delay in that

essential respect. I authorised Milner to do what he could to restore the broken Versailles Front by conferring upon Foch the necessary authority to organise a reserve and to control its disposition. How well Milner carried out this arrangement will appear when I tell the story of the Doullens Conference. It fell far short of the Versailles plan, but it was as far as he could obtain agreement, and it was on the road to the establishment of final unity amongst the armies. Before I give an account of the Doullens decision I must first of all give a further account of what we ascertained was actually happening in the matter of reinforcing the broken front of the Third and Fifth Armies.

When the attack began on March 21st, G.H.Q. had two divisions—the 20th and the 39th—in reserve behind the Fifth Army. I have already reckoned these amongst the divisions holding that part of the front. As these two divisions were in Gough's opinion too far behind his army, he was anxious to move them closer up to the front. He moved the 39th Division a little closer to the front. The 20th Division was 15 miles behind the front of the XVIII Corps, and he wanted to move it up five to eight miles further north of it. In addition he wished to move forward the 50th Division, which was a division just brought down from the Fourth Army and placed in Army Reserve. It was more than 25 miles behind his front, and he wished to bring it at least one day's march nearer. In his opinion, these steps were "most urgent, almost vital," and he asked the authority of G.H.Q. for these moves. He was refused permission to move a man. As he himself points out in his book, "no one had suffered more from the failure to recognise this principle than had Haig himself at the Battle of Loos, when Sir John French had denied him the use of his reserves until too late." In fact, French's dismissal and Haig's appointment as his successor were largely attributable to this action on French's part. There can be no doubt that G.H.Q.'s refusal to allow these two divisions to be shifted nearer to the front had injurious effects. Although when the battle started, Gough finally took the responsibility for ordering them up without permission from G.H.Q., the 20th Division did not come into action until the 22nd and the 50th Division not until the afternoon of the same day.

If these divisions had been thrown in during the first day of the battle, they might have helped to stay the German advance ; but they were quite inadequate to restore a line which had been broken by a force where the assailants were in the proportion of three or four to one of the defenders and the best entrenchments had already fallen into enemy hands. There ought to have been many more divisions ready to be thrown in, at the latest on the second day of the battle. The first division sent by G.H.Q. to the broken front was the 8th. It reached Eterpigny, a few miles behind the line to which the army had retreated, by the 23rd—the third day of the battle, but only some of its units came into action on that day. On the morning of the 24th, the fourth day of the battle, its front line was six miles behind that held by the British Army on the previous morning, and fourteen miles behind the original front. The second division ordered to move in support of the Fifth Army was the 35th. Some incomplete battalions without artillery came into action on the fourth day, but it was only on the 25th—that is, the fifth day of the battle, that the division was complete. Its remaining battalions arrived that day, and its artillery came up in the course of the afternoon. As rail accommodation from the north was fully occupied in the movement of the 8th Division and of divisions which had been ordered to support the Third Army, the 35th had to march by road. Had these divisions been shifted nearer the threatened sectors as soon as it was discovered where the blow was to come, these tragic delays would not have occurred and these reinforcements might have exerted a decisive influence on the course of the battle. No

other reinforcements were sent by G.H.Q. to that battle front during the week of incessant fighting.

On the night of the 24th the whole of the VII Corps, including the 35th Division, was transferred to the Third Army, and thus passed out of Gough's control. On the 28th the remainder of his army was placed under General Rawlinson's command. Gough's statement, therefore, that during the whole of the time he was in command in that battle he was only given one additional division (the 8th) from the reserves of G.H.Q. on other fronts is quite accurate.

This extraordinary tardiness in sending reinforcements may be explained by the slowness with which G.H.Q. came to comprehend the seriousness of the position. I have quoted the first telegram from Haig to C.I.G.S. which used the phrase "the situation is serious." That was received on the third day of the fight. Gough reports that he had a conversation with Haig's Chief of the Staff, Lawrence, late at night of the first day of the battle. To quote his words :—

*G.H.Q. slow
to appreciate
situation*

"Lawrence did not seem to grasp the seriousness of the situation ; he thought that ' the Germans would not come on again the next day ' ; ' after the severe losses they had suffered,' he thought that they ' would be busy cleaning the battlefield,' ' collecting the wounded, reorganising, and resting their tired troops.'

I disagreed emphatically, but I failed to make much impression. It has always been my opinion that G.H.Q. did not fully grasp the magnitude of the assault on the Fifth Army, or the desperate odds which it had to contend with, and this may have accounted for the misconceptions that we

allowed to circulate so freely, even in the Cabinet, during the following weeks.”*

The telegrams from G.H.Q. passed on to the Cabinet by the C.I.G.S. show that if there were any misconceptions as to the condition of things in Cabinet circles, it was due to this lack of understanding on the part of G.H.Q. in France as to what had really taken place. As I pointed out, the first telegram from Haig which showed that he had at last woken up to the gravity of the situation, came to the War Office on the morning of the third day of the battle.

What was happening in French Headquarters? The impression made on the mind of Pétain and his

Staff by the first news was that this was *Attitude in* not the real offensive—it was only a local *French G.H.Q.* attack in order to induce the French to take their reserves away from the Cham-

pagne Front where the real attack was to be made. During the whole of the first and second days of the battle, Pétain had no communication of any sort from Haig. During the first day nothing came to the French G.H.Q. at Compiègne except rumours and scraps of incoherent reports, not one of which came from the British G.H.Q. In the afternoon of the first day General Humbert, who had been appointed by Pétain to command the reserves which were to be sent to help the British in certain contingencies, visited Gough's Headquarters. Gough asked him whether he had brought reinforcements. Humbert answered that he had nothing except the little banneret fluttering on the bonnet of his car. Not a single battalion had been placed under his command. That was the “perfect arrangement worked out in

* Gough: “The Fifth Army,” p. 271.

every detail," which was to be the substitute for a General Reserve in the day of trial. It is only fair to Pétain to say that without waiting to be asked, he put arrangements in hand on the evening of the 21st for sending divisions of the French V Corps to assist the British. Haig sent a message thanking him for his prompt support, but saying he did not want the French to intervene yet.

On the second day, the 125th French Division began to arrive behind the British lines ; *French troops begin to arrive* but it was not complete and it was therefore not put into the line until the morning of the 23rd—that is, the third day of the battle. This was the first reinforcement of any kind Gough received.

On the evening of the second day, Pétain heard, probably from his own Intelligence Staff, that "the enemy had broken through a large portion of the British lines, and had driven back Gough's Army, which, beaten down by great masses of troops and overwhelmed by their numbers, was retreating precipitately. Behind the British right there was no reserve at all." But an event occurred that night which turned the attention of the French Headquarters to much more menacing things. German aeroplanes dropped a number of bombs on the Headquarters at Compiègne, killing two officers. This had never happened before in the whole course of the War. Headquarters on both sides were sacred and immune from the perils which befell the mere fighting soldier. But evidently there were depths of barbarism which the "Hun" had not yet plumbed. Headquarters were as excited as an ant's nest into which a stone had been dropped. Officers and

archives were moved that night into the forest where they would be hidden from the German destroyer. Late at night, when Headquarters were made safe from bombers, they turned their attention once more to carrying out the arrangements made with Haig. A second division, and a cavalry division, were ordered to go to the British Front, and came into action in the afternoon of the third day of the battle, without their artillery or transport, and with only the ammunition they carried on their persons. The "arrangements" were beginning to work, but oh ! how slowly and how timorously !

On the fourth day of the battle two more French divisions, but without their artillery or transport and with not much more ammunition than they carried in their bandoliers, arrived. This to help an army which had lost most of its guns !

On that day the French took over the southern end of the British line. After four days of desperate fighting, when the odds were so heavily against us, the entire reinforcements consisted of six divisions—three without their artillery. It transposed the odds from about three or four to one to a certain three to one ; the three consisting of troops inspired by victory, the one made up mostly of the broken remnants of a defeated army and of divisions hurried along and arriving in the night panting and without their equipment of guns and ammunition.

That night Pétain and Haig met for the first time during the battle to discuss and decide arrangements.

Gough saw Haig, for the first time since the battle began, on Sunday, the 24th, when he met him at Corps H.Q. and talked to him for about ten minutes. No General Officer from G.H.Q. had visited the Fifth Army to see

*G.H.Q.
neglect of
Fifth Army*

what was going on, nor did any member of G.H.Q. (other than Lawrence) visit Gough from one end of the battle to the other. Haig's consolation to Gough for his defeat was "Well, Hubert, you cannot fight a battle without men." He never told him that but for the Passchendaele obsession his defences would have been better prepared and his line more strongly held, and that had it not been for Haig's refusal to work the Versailles scheme for a General Reserve, ample reinforcements would have reached him in time to counter-attack the enemy and fling them back. Three weeks before the battle he knew where it was coming. Had he then taken steps to rearrange his forces so as to hold the threatened sectors of the Third and Fifth as strongly as the two Northern (and unmenaced) sectors were then being held, there would have been $37\frac{1}{2}$ divisions to face the enemy, instead of 30. What an enormous difference that would have made to the result, even without a General Reserve! And the fronts of the First and Second Armies could still have been held more strongly than that of the Fifth Army on the first day of the battle.

What was happening to the Third Army? This was much better cared for than the slighted and cast out Fifth. Byng was given 16 divisions to hold 28 miles of line, to Gough's 14 to hold 42 miles. It had another advantage in that it was next-door neighbour to the privileged sectors where Haig had massed most of his troops. How great a pull that was the first few days of the battle demonstrated. The reserves were at least one day nearer. Between the 21st and 23rd March, G.H.Q. issued orders for the bringing of eight divisions from the Northern Fronts to reinforce

*Stubborn
stand of
Third Army*

the Third Army—each division fully equipped and containing 50 per cent. more troops than the French divisions that came to Gough's aid. As these divisions came from contiguous sectors they also came into action several hours before the Fifth Army reinforcements. The Third Army might have held the ground without retreating at all had it not been for the complication of the Flesquières salient. The account of the battle given in the Official History shows how important and damaging a part that salient played in the fight. It completely disarranged and dislocated our defence. Three whole divisions had been set apart to defend it, although it had been admitted by G.H.Q. to be indefensible whenever seriously attacked. The Germans worked their way round it and Byng found it difficult to extricate his troops from toils he himself had woven and into which he had firmly tucked three unfortunate divisions. Instead of getting out whilst the going was fairly good he tried to hold half the salient. He was reluctant to give up the only bit of ground he had won in the bungled tank attack of Cambrai. The result was that right and left the whole defence of his line and part of Gough's were thrown out of gear. A great gap was opened between the Third and Fifth Armies. Tudor, with the 9th Division which had on the 21st March conducted a gallant and successful fight on the left flank of the Fifth Army, was compelled by the Flesquières folly to retreat from a position his fine division had so skilfully and valiantly defended. The Fifth Army seemed to be doomed to bear the shortcomings and stupidities of all concerned both in the preparations for this battle and in its actual conduct. The Germans to the right of Flesquières and

*Handicap of
Flesquières
salient*

on the extreme right of Byng's Army were being held and their attacks repelled with appalling slaughter, but this serious tactical blunder gave them an opening. The Third Army was forced into a general and almost a headlong retreat and it was only the arrival of substantial reinforcements that enabled it to reform its front. Still on the front of the Third Army, taken as a whole, in spite of a considerable loss of ground by us, the Germans sustained much more damage than they inflicted. Their losses crippled them seriously at the time and still more in their future operations, and if the Third and Fifth Armies had even now been reinforced in time, the German advance could have been arrested and such a counter-blow delivered before they had consolidated their conquests as would have driven them back with severe losses. This check would have converted an enemy victory into a decisive defeat which would have put an end to any further hope of a German offensive. That is, the Allied victory of the 18th July might have been anticipated. But would sufficient reinforcements reach the two Armies to avert disaster?

*Position at
end of
four days*

What was the position on the whole battle front after four days of intense fighting?

The Fifth Army was no longer an Army.

It was broken up into fragments—still fighting as it drifted back. It is right to note that there was no running away. To quote one report : “there was no skedaddle.” But the zig-zag where it rested on the night of the 24th was on an average over 16 miles behind the line which it held at dawn on the 21st and further retreats were inevitable. It was anticipated by British and French Headquarters that Amiens would be lost. The Third Army was also in full retreat. It had been driven miles behind the

original line. Pétain on the fourth day was arranging to take over the southern portion of the Fifth Army area, but even on the sixth day of the battle he told Poincaré that he was afraid his divisions would not arrive in time to relieve the British Army. That was the prospect when Milner arrived in France on the afternoon of the 24th. From a member of our Staff at Versailles he learnt the actual situation. How little we had been told of the facts is made clear by one of the first sentences in the Memorandum he wrote on his visit for the benefit of the War Cabinet.

*Milner learns
the facts*

“The great mystery was the breakdown of the Fifth Army, which so far was not explained.”

He was told that it was so much broken and its communications cut in all directions, that it was difficult to make out exactly what had happened. Apparently there was no one at G.H.Q. who was able to enlighten him. But he heard enough there, and on the road to Versailles, to come to the conclusion that “there was no doubt that this army was shattered and a breach effected in the Allied line between the right flank of the Third Army and the French.” That meant that the Germans were within sight of attaining one of their great objectives—the separation of the French and the British Armies. The retreating troops were “still fighting at a number of points, and sometimes even counter-attacking, but were no longer anything like an organised barrier to the German advance.”

The following day, Monday, March 25th, he

attended a Conference held at Pétain's Headquarters, Clemenceau, Loucheur, Pétain and Foch being also present. Pétain took a very *Conference at French G.H.Q.* pessimistic view of the condition of the Fifth Army, which he said, as an army, had ceased to exist and would have to be completely reorganised. It had now been placed by Haig under his (Pétain's) orders. He was bringing up from the south and west—mostly from the south—"all the divisions he could possibly spare to support and replace the debris of the Fifth Army." But Pétain was still deluded by "the danger of the Germans pushing down the Oise from above Noyon, and a threatened attack in the region of Rheims."

Foch, who seems to have spoken with energy and determination, took a different view of the situation. He thought the danger of the *Foch's plucky attitude* German push to break in between the French and British in the direction of Amiens was so formidable that risks must be taken in other directions. In his opinion, even more divisions must, if possible, be thrown in, and, by a great effort, this might be done more quickly than Pétain thought possible. It is in an emergency that the real quality of a man comes out. In front of this grave crisis both Pétain and Haig were bewildered and incapable of the action which a desperate situation demanded, but Foch rose to the occasion with the might of a giant. That accounts for the complete change which Milner found in the attitude of both Commanders-in-Chief towards this great old General. They were now anxious to retrace the fatal steps they had conjointly taken on the Versailles decision and to secure the help of Foch to extricate them from the dilemma in which their

repudiation of his supremacy had landed the Allied Armies. At the end of the Conference, Poincaré and Clemenceau urged that something should be done in order to re-establish the complete co-operation of the two Armies. Although Milner had always been anxious for action on those lines, he could not take upon himself the responsibility of deciding until he had had an opportunity of consulting Haig. He might have pointed out that no one was more responsible than Clemenceau himself for the fact that the scheme agreed to by the Supreme Council seven weeks ago for securing such co-operation had been completely frustrated. After the Conference was over, Milner told Clemenceau that he had some misgivings "whether Pétain on his side was prepared to take sufficient risks in order to bring up all possible French reserves, on which, as it seemed to him, everything depended."

Clemenceau replied "that he agreed, but that Pétain was already doing *much more than he had originally contemplated*, and would, he believed, do more still." What an admission of the complete inadequacy of the arrangements made between Pétain and Haig as a substitution for the 30 Division Reserves under independent command !

The following day, March 26th, a Conference was held at Doullens at which Poincaré, Clemenceau, Pétain and Foch represented the French, and Milner, Haig and Wilson the British. When Milner arrived there, Clemenceau at once "seized him and startled him by the announcement that Haig had just declared that he would be obliged to uncover Amiens and fall back on the Channel ports." Milner immediately saw Haig, Plumer,

*Doullens
Conference*

Horne and Byng, and Haig assured him that he had been misunderstood. Haig did not inform them that he had only the day before handed to Weygand (Foch's Chief of the Staff) the following document :—

“ SECRET.

The intention of the enemy is evidently to push strong forces between the English and French Armies and having effected this purpose to detain the French Army while throwing his whole available strength on the English and force the latter back upon the sea.

*Haig's
defeatist
memorandum*

On the English Front from the sea to Ercheu the enemy have 65 divisions in line with 33 divisions in reserve of which latter 20 are fresh divisions. On the French Front from Ercheu to the Swiss frontier are 71 divisions in line with 24 divisions in reserve of which 21 are fresh divisions. But 15 divisions of the 71 in line are not fighting divisions.

The battle, which has lasted since 21st on the English Front has probably exhausted a certain number of German divisions and they are now drawing on the divisions holding the line or in reserve elsewhere.

But it is highly improbable that more than 21 reserve divisions are available for offensive on the French Front.

The progress made by the enemy on our right and along the valley of the Somme makes it evident that it can only be a question of time when the French and English Armies are driven apart. It becomes necessary to take immediate steps to restore the situation

and this is only possible by concentrating immediately astride the Somme west of AMIENS at least 20 French divisions to operate on the flank of the German movement against the English Army, *which must fight its way slowly back covering the Channel ports.*

Any delay in deciding upon this plan would make the situation critical.

The two French divisions in Belgium should be concentrated immediately at DOULLENS.

25th March, 1918.

* Copy of above handed to General Weygand at Abbeville at 4 p.m.

* D. HAIG, F.M.

25th March, 1918."

(The asterisk signifies that this was written in Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig's own hand-writing.)

Haig clearly took a desperate view of the position. It is difficult to comprehend in the face of this document why he should have told Milner that he had been misunderstood. Pétain expressed an identical opinion about the same time to Clemenceau, and according to Poincaré was actually ordering a retreat of the French Army to the south, and Clemenceau had agreed with Pétain. It would look, therefore, as if the two Commanders at this Conference on the evening of the 24th had come to the same conclusion. The supreme courage of Foch saved the situation. This was the greatest moment in his career. Here Poincaré's Diary on the subject is worth

*Haig
and Pétain
pessimistic*

quoting, as, taken in conjunction with Haig's Memorandum, it shows the depth of dejection in which these eminent Commanders were floundering at this date.

"He (Clemenceau) broke off to confide in me sadly that General Pétain was contemplating the retreat of the French Army to the south while the British Army retired towards the north. Pétain, added Clemenceau, had given orders on this basis. Foch confirmed this last piece of information and told me of the order to retreat which Pétain had given. 'The President of the Council (Clemenceau),' added Foch, 'has only just lately begun to take part in military matters ; he had accepted Pétain's point of view, but I declined to take any responsibility for it. I sent M. Clemenceau a note to tell him my views. Common sense indicates that when the enemy wishes to begin making a hole, you do not make it wider. You close it, or you try to close it. We have only got to try and to have the will ; the rest will be easy. You stick to your ground, you defend it foot by foot. We did that at Ypres, we did it at Verdun.' And Foch stuck to his point with the same energy before Clemenceau, the senator and the deputy.

Clemenceau, becoming more and more converted, took me aside and said : 'Pétain is annoying because of his pessimism. Just think of it, he said to me what I would tell no one but yourself. It was this : 'The Germans will beat the British in open country ; after that, they will beat us too.' Ought a General to talk, or even think, like that ? ' "

Before entering into the Conference at Doullens, Milner had a few words with Haig alone about Foch, and "was delighted to find that, so far from resenting, as he had been led to believe he might do, the thought of Foch's interference, he rather welcomed the idea of working with the latter, about whom his tone was now altogether friendly." After some interchange of views, the Conference agreed to the following form of words :—

*Haig agrees
to appointment
of Foch*

"General Foch is charged by the British and French Governments to co-ordinate the action of the Allied Armies on the Western Front. He will work to this end with the Commanders-in-Chief, who are asked to furnish him with all necessary information."

Haig "seemed not only quite willing but really pleased."

What had been accomplished by this decision? I will quote two opinions expressed, one by the President of the Republic, who was at the Conference, and another by a very competent military observer, General Bliss. In a conversation which Poincaré had with Milner immediately after the meeting, he said :—

*Poincaré's
verdict on
Doullens
agreement*

"This co-ordination was not worth as much as unity of command. To which Milner replied that there was no knowing what the future held in store, and in any case, co-ordination itself

represented a step forward and would offer great advantages."

Both Poincaré's statement and Milner's reply constitute a very fair appreciation of what had been accomplished. It was a long way off unity of command. That was for the future. Meanwhile it was, as Milner truly said, an improvement on existing conditions.

General Bliss, writing about the Doullens Conference, confirms Poincaré's and Milner's views about what took place. This is what *Bliss's estimate of it* he has written about the Doullens Resolution :—

"Many persons think that this action made General Foch the Allied Commander-in-Chief. It did not. His functions were limited to the British and French Armies. They did not extend to the American Army. No American was summoned to the conference at Doullens. No control was given over the Belgian or Italian Armies. *Moreover, there was given him no power of command. He could only consult and advise. The result was what might have been expected. He had to waste precious time in travelling to one headquarters and the other, persuading Commanders to do what he should have been empowered to order.*"

A day or two after the Doullens Conference, General Gough was superseded. After days of hard fighting with insufficient forces against unfair odds his army had been shattered. The French, very unfairly, threw the blame of the defeat on him. Haig practically adopted the same line by removing

Gough from his command. In his Despatches on this battle Haig, explaining Gough's supersession, writes :—

“ Our troops had been engaged for a full week with an almost overwhelming superiority of hostile forces.”

He proceeds to say that this had “ thrown an exceptional strain on General Gough and his Staff ” and that “ in order to avoid the loss of efficiency which a continuance of such a strain might have entailed,” he decided to appoint General Rawlinson to the command of the Fifth Army. Gough was sent to the rear to look after the digging. Whose fault was it that there had been an overwhelming superiority against the Fifth Army for a whole week ? It was certainly not Gough's. Taking the Western Front as a whole, I have quoted official figures to show that the rival armies were approximately equal in numbers with a slight superiority in favour of the Allies, but with a definite mechanical advantage to the British and the French. Haig acknowledges that he knew in time where the offensive was coming. Gough was not responsible for the disposition of the Allied forces in such a way as to give to the Germans overwhelming superiority at the point of attack, and he could not be blamed for the fact that at the end of a full week of hard fighting the Germans still possessed that overwhelming superiority on the battle front. It was not Gough who strangled the army of manœuvre which was designed for such an emergency as had arisen. Nevertheless, Gough's sacrifice has pointed the finger of censure at him. That was unfair—nay it was shabby. Whatever may be said

of this gallant officer, he was certainly unfortunate in the tasks which had been entrusted to him by his Commander-in-Chief in this War. In Flanders he had been put in charge of an enterprise in which the finest army in the world and the most brilliant general could not have won success. On the Somme he had been given a position to defend which no general could have held with such few troops and guns in the line and in reserve. With a little help on the first day he would probably have beaten off the Germans. A few divisions would have done it.

Contrary to what is frequently stated, the dismissal of Gough from command of the Fifth Army was ordered by Haig entirely on his own initiative, without any instruction from home.* The War Cabinet subsequently ordered Gough home, as this culminating dismissal of him by Haig, following the retreat of the Fifth Army, and the flood of rumours circulating in military circles against him made it *prima facie* appear that he was in some way culpable. Further inquiry did not support that case, and Lord Milner sent him a letter fully exonerating him and pronouncing him eligible for a fresh command.†

When Foch was given the rôle of co-ordinator the battle was going heavily in favour of the enemy. I recollect that on Good Friday morning the news filled us with anxiety and apprehension. The Germans were pressing British and French troops steadily back towards Amiens at a rate that made it seem inevitable that this important railway junction would fall into their hands. That would have been a catastrophe and we were not certain whether Foch's appointment had come in time to avert it. On the

* See "Haig's Diary," edited by Duff Cooper, Vol. II, p. 267.

† "Official History, France and Belgium, 1918," Vol. I, p. viii.

northern flank of the Third Army the Germans had launched another great attack which if it succeeded would have placed the whole of the Army in jeopardy. The only news received by Friday morning about the progress of this fresh development was not reassuring. We had been forced out of some of our positions and the battle was still raging. We were barely holding our own. Sir Maurice Hankey and I sat for hours in the Cabinet Room waiting anxiously for further reports from the front. We decided at last to go to St. Anne's, Soho, to hear Bach's Passion music. As we took our seats we heard the clergyman intone that poignant supplication, "Oh God make speed to save us." How fervently we joined in the response, "Oh Lord make haste to help us!" When we returned to Downing Street we heard that the Germans had been beaten off by the Third Army with heavy losses and that their advance was slowing down opposite Amiens.

CHAPTER LXXIX

BEAUVAIS AND THE CAMPAIGN OF THE NORTH

I. THE BEAUVAIS CONFERENCE

THE Doullens Resolution did not work as satisfactorily as we had hoped. General Foch might flit from one Headquarters to another, and *Arrangement* suggest and propose and urge in his *inadequate* peremptory and vehement way one plan after another, but it was for Pétain and Haig to decide and with their Staffs to work out the details and give their own orders in their own way and their own time. These two Generals were quite happy to share the responsibility with Foch, but they were not ready to part with any of their authority. The greatest defect of the Doullens agreement was that it did not equip Foch with the necessary authority gradually to build up the Inter-Allied Reserve which was essential to any great scheme of counter-offensive. Haig and Pétain had gone a long way but even in this moment of despair they were not ready to accept the Versailles decision as to an independent General Reserve commanded by Foch.

Reports came to the Cabinet that the Doullens *Foch* arrangement was not working smoothly. *dissatisfied* Serious misunderstandings had arisen *with Doullens* which were likely to affect prejudicially *agreement* the conduct of the campaign. There was no one on the spot with any authority to

settle these differences. Foch could not co-ordinate, because he was not in a position to command. That this was Foch's view is made clear by him in his Memoirs :—

“ Now to plan this offensive action, to inspire and direct it, to ensure its being carried out by the Commanders-in-Chief, and also to arrive at an equitable distribution of forces, the powers conferred upon me by the Doullens Agreement were plainly inadequate. They were insufficient to cover even the present defensive operations ; they would necessarily be all the more inadequate when, in the not far distant future, it became my duty to decide upon the strategic employment of the Allied Armies, renewed and strengthened by the co-operation of the Americans ; to determine, according to circumstances, the point against which these forces should be applied ; to distribute the offensive and defensive tasks, and possibly to effect exchanges between the French and Italian Fronts.

The simple rôle of *co-ordinator* was not sufficient for the larger programme which would certainly have to be undertaken shortly. It gave far too little play to the *initiative* of the officer who filled it, if he was to react rapidly and forcibly to contingencies brought about by a defensive battle, or to organise and launch important offensive operations. The rôle should be changed into one of *direction*. If the Inter-Allied organ created at Doullens by an effort of mutual confidence was to produce all that was expected of it, its powers must at once be widened, and the strategic direction of the War on the Western Front entrusted to it. Its authority over the Allied Commanders-in-Chief should be

affirmed, and this authority extended to include all the troops in line from the North Sea to the Adriatic.

A few days' experience had been sufficient to expose the inadequacy of the Doullens Agreement. The present as well as the future interests of the Coalition required that it be amended without delay."*

It was decided that another meeting with Clemenceau and the Generals should be arranged to straighten out this unsatisfactory position. I knew there was only one practical solution. and that was to appoint Foch to the Supreme Command of both armies, but at the meeting of the War Cabinet held to discuss the subject of my proposed visit I found that the majority were opposed to any such idea. Wilson, who was present, was thoroughly hostile to it. He said that Foch probably did not require any powers beyond those already accorded to him. This statement I subsequently found to be completely inaccurate. When I met Foch he was in despair at his impotence to direct the battle as he desired it to be fought. The Cabinet resolved that "the decisions must be left to my discretion after I had an opportunity of discussing the matter with Sir Douglas Haig." The meeting which finally led to the establishment of real unity of command was held at the Hôtel de Ville, Beauvais, on April 3rd, 1918. On my way to Beauvais, Wilson and I called at Haig's Headquarters. Haig and his Chief of Staff, Lawrence, then accompanied us to Beauvais. I drove part of the way with the Commander-in-

*War Cabinet
opposes his
appointment to
Supreme
Command*

* Foch : " Memoirs " (Translation, pp. 313 and 314).

Chief and the rest with his C.G.S. I thus was able to gather their views as to the progress of the battle. I found neither of them forthcoming on the subject of increasing Foch's powers. They saw no need for it. They were convinced that things were getting on quite well. When I reported to them the successful arrangements we had concluded for the shipping of American troops to France I expected not gratitude but some sense of relief over the good news. On the contrary they were both cool and sniffy about it. They gave me the impression that they did not think much of American help in 1918. It was only so much more trouble for G.H.Q. if they were incorporated in our divisions and when it was done it would be more a source of weakness than of strength! They thought of these masses that would soon be pouring into France as if they were an untrained rabble.

Not far from Beauvais I drove through the remnants of some of the broken battalions of the Fifth Army who were resting in villages behind the line. I have never observed a more *Cheerfulness of Fifth Army* cheerful crowd of men. There was no trace of dejection or despair. They accosted the delegation with smiling faces. It was not my picture of a defeated army.

When I came to the Hôtel de Ville I found Clemenceau, Foch, Pétain, Pershing and Bliss awaiting us.

I had a preliminary conversation with Clemenceau and *Conference at Beauvais* confided to him that I thought that the Doullens arrangement was too vague and that it was imperative that Foch should be endowed with greater and more direct authority over the Allied forces. Clemenceau, having already been approached by Foch on the subject and convinced by him, was of the same

opinion. He began the conference by explaining that though the Doullens agreement had worked well up to a point, "the situation was, however, developing and a stage had been reached when it was necessary to define, with greater precision, the position of the 'General of the Coalition' as he would call General Foch." In fact, a decision was required as to whether the Doullens arrangement should stand as it was, or whether it required widening. He then called on General Foch to explain his views. Before he did so I asked that General Foch, in giving his views, would particularly specify in what respects he considered that the Doullens arrangement conferred insufficient authority on him to co-ordinate the action of the two armies. General Foch in reply :—

"reminded the Conference that the Doullens arrangement stated that he was charged with co-ordinating the action of the Allied
Foch states his views Armies on the Western Front. This implied that if there were no action, there was nothing to co-ordinate. If the

French were taking no action, and if the British Army were taking no action, it was impossible to co-ordinate their action. Consequently something more was now wanted. He required the power to imply an idea of action to the Commanders-in-Chief, and to have this action carried out. In fact, before co-ordinating he must have the power of creating action. For this reason the text of the Doullens arrangement was insufficient, and should be made to include 'power for the infusion of an idea of action.' Moreover, it was not so much necessary to co-ordinate the action itself as the

preparation of action. In quiet times it was necessary to create an idea around which the preparations should be made in co-ordination. On the 26th March at Doullens, the situation was very different from what it was on the 3rd April at Beauvais. On the former date it was a question of co-ordinating action which was in full swing. On the latter date it was a question of co-ordinating our preparation for future action. On the 26th March our armies were submitting to a battle imposed on us by the enemy, but to-day at Beauvais, we were thinking of our own action. In this latter case the powers of mere co-ordination of action were insufficient."

Sir Henry Wilson, who now that he had exchanged Versailles for Whitehall had rather modified his Versailles outlook, and had discussed the question with Haig in his car on the way to Beauvais, thought Doullens gave Foch all the powers he required and that there was no need for extension. Foch replied :—

"that, if there was no action, or no movement, there was nothing to co-ordinate. His requirements would be met by the insertion of some words such as "order" ("*ordonner*") or "to give orders" ("*donner des ordres*")."

From Foch's statements ~~he~~ realised that the Cabinet had not been fully informed by the C.I.G.S. as to the main defect in the working of the Doullens agreement. Foch's complaint *Foch thinking of an offensive* was not so much in respect of differences which had arisen on particular sections of the battle front and which needed adjustment,

although it was not functioning altogether smoothly in that direction. It was a much more important issue. His thoughts projected beyond the arrest of the German attempt to break through at Amiens. Foch's mind was not so much on the German offensive which had now been checked but on the great counter-stroke which he had sketched in his famous January Memorandum on the plan of campaign for 1918. He was thinking of the next step—of the necessary preparations for fighting out to a final decision the vast battle which had commenced. In this essential task he found himself hampered by lack of real authority. As he was the only General in the field with the necessary vision and decision to plan out such a campaign I decided to take all risks to secure for him the requisite power. If I felt that I could not, there and then, commit the Cabinet the whole way in view of the misgivings they had revealed at their last meeting, I resolved to go as far as I could to-day and on my return carry the Cabinet with me the rest of the way.

I therefore followed Foch in this strain :—

“ MR. LLOYD GEORGE said that, speaking on behalf of the British public, they were very anxious to ensure that divided counsels should not end in disaster. A real effort had been made to co-ordinate the action of the Allies by means of the Supreme War Council and the Permanent Military Representatives at Versailles, because it had been realised that the Germans had one army and the Allies had three. Even last year the Allies on the Western Front had two strategies : Field-Marshal Haig's and General Pétain's.

*My speech to
the conference*

FIELD-MARSHAL HAIG interpolated that last year, he was under the orders of General Nivelle."

Haig was flushed and by his voice and manner I saw he was very angry at the line I was taking.

"MR. LLOYD GEORGE said that he did not refer to that period, although he reminded the Conference that General Nivelle's strategy had achieved the most valuable results, so far as the British Army was concerned, of the whole year's fighting, since it had put the Allies in possession of the Vimy Ridge and the country east of Arras. What he had referred to, however, were the operations later in the year, when Field-Marshal Haig had been fighting in Flanders and General Pétain's Army had been carrying out operations with limited objectives at considerable intervals. The consequence was that, although the Allies had had a superiority against the Germans of something approaching three to two, they had, in fact, achieved very little. In their recent offensive, however, the Germans, though probably not superior in numbers, had achieved very considerable results, and this was mainly due to their unity of control. Versailles had been set up with the object of securing a similar unity of action, but it had not been in full operation when this offensive commenced and none of its decisions had been carried out. Whatever had resulted from the recent actions must be credited entirely to the measures of co-ordination which had been achieved, but it was not sufficient.

What he was apprehensive of was that the Allied Governments would to-day merely reach a new

formula without achieving any real unity of command. The British public wanted, and intended to know whether there was real unity. What we had now to decide was that General Foch should really have all the powers he needed. He said that the British public entirely believed in General Foch, as proved by the way in which his appointment had been received in the Press. Of course if General Foch should put the British Army in great peril, Field-Marshal Haig would appeal to his own Government, and no paper which could be drawn up could prevent this. Consequently, there was no objection to some words being put in to this effect. Unless he had the necessary power, however, General Foch would prove worse than useless. He said he would much like to hear the views of the American Generals on the subject, more particularly as General Bliss and General Pershing now had a special claim to attention, since the Army of the United States of America would be fighting side by side with their Allies under President Wilson's recent decision."

The ensuing discussion will give an idea of the different points of view of those who took part in the Conference :—

GENERAL PERSHING said that it appeared to him that we had now reached a point in the War where entire co-operation of the Allied Armies should be assured. As a matter of principle, he knew no way to ensure such co-operation except by a single command. It was impossible for two or three Commanders-in-Chief, whose Commands were spread over such a huge front, by themselves to

co-ordinate their activities unless the Armies were under one head. The experiments in this direction had already gone far enough. They had proved completely that co-ordination was impossible. Each General had his own responsibilities to think of. Success from now onwards would depend upon the Allies having a single command."

After this speech and another by General Bliss which gave to my proposal the powerful support of the two American Generals, Haig and Wilson saw that the Conference was not satisfied with leaving matters where they were, and that an extension of the Doullens arrangement was inevitable. Haig after consultation with Wilson then said :—

*Haig and
Wilson fall
into line*

" he was in entire agreement with what General Pershing said. There should be only one Head in France. His own instructions from the British Government were to take his ideas of strategy from the French Commander-in-Chief, although he was responsible for the safety of the British Army. Consequently he had always, subject, of course, to the orders of the British Government, looked to the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army for his strategical ideas. It would be very easy to insert in the agreement what General Foch required, and he thought that General Wilson's draft was satisfactory. What was really needed, however, was that the Commanders-in-Chief should work whole-heartedly and willingly in the closest co-operation with General Foch."

It was news to me that Haig was of opinion " there should be only one Head in France," and that he

had "looked to the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army for his strategical ideas." It would have saved much tribulation and loss had he made it clear both in 1917 and in the early months of 1918.

M. Clemenceau then read a draft of a new agreement based on proposals made by General Wilson. Ultimately the following resolution was adopted :—

"The arrangement for the co-ordination of the Higher Command on the Western Front, concluded at Doullens on the 26th March, 1918, should be superseded by the following arrangement :—

*The new
agreement*

General Foch is charged by the British, French and American Governments with the co-ordination of the action of the Allied Armies on the Western Front. To this end all powers necessary to secure effective realisation are conferred on him. The British, French and American Governments for this purpose entrust to General Foch the strategic direction of military operations. The Commanders-in-Chief of the British, French and American Armies have full control of the tactical employment of their forces. Each Commander-in-Chief will have the right of appeal to his Government if in his opinion the safety of his Army is compromised by any order received from General Foch."

This Resolution carried matters much further than the Doullens plan. Foch was for the first time entrusted by the British, French and American Governments with the strategic direction of military operations and all the necessary powers were conferred upon him for that purpose.

As General Bliss afterwards wrote in his account of the Beauvais Conference :—

“ It resulted in the nearest approximation to giving General Foch supreme command that was ever attained.”

There is no better illustration of the difference made by the Beauvais Resolution in the development of the campaign than the discussion which
Abbeville took place at an Allied Conference held
Conference at Abbeville on 1st and 2nd May, 1918,* when Signor Orlando, on behalf of the Italian Army, raised the question of whether General Foch's functions as Commander-in-Chief should extend to the Italian Army and said that although he was prepared to accept the application of the Beauvais arrangement to the Italian troops that were in France at that time, he claimed that the Doullens agreement alone was applicable to the Army in Italy as that gave Foch the right to co-ordinate but not to command. As a commentary on the Beauvais decision and an exposition of the difference it made on the powers of Foch this discussion is worth perusing.

Foch was not altogether satisfied with this resolution. He thought that unless he had the power to issue orders to the two Commanders-in-Chief there would always be trouble in the interpretation even of the extended powers now conferred upon him. There was, according to him, no such office known to the Army as co-ordinator. In his characteristic way he said : “ What am I ? I am Monsieur Foch, *très bien connu* (with a smile), *mais toujours Monsieur Foch.*”

* Appendix, p. 2968 (Abbeville Conference).

I saw the force of his criticisms, and having regard to what happened after Doullens I thought his apprehensions were justified. I explained to him the difficulties I had, not only with Haig, but with national susceptibilities at home ; but I promised that I would do my best to secure the assent of the British War Cabinet to making him *Général-en-Chef* and I asked him whether that would satisfy him. He said : " That is a different matter altogether. If that were done there would be no more difficulties." On my return to England I sounded my colleagues and when I thought them ready for the suggestion I placed the whole matter before the Cabinet, and after some discussion they agreed to the appointment of Foch as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces. Unity of command was thus, after a great many vicissitudes, completely established, and for the first time the whole of the forces of the Allies on the Western Front were consolidated and united, not merely for defence, but for the great return blow that brought the War to a triumphant end. The disaster of the 21st of March had saved the Allies. Nothing else would have made it possible for us to overcome the natural susceptibilities and suspicions which had to be removed in order to enable us to achieve that unity which was essential to victory.

When Briand and I first made the experiment in unity of command in the spring of 1917, we encountered the resistance of two men, Haig and Robertson, whose most outstanding faculty was stubbornness. Their abilities were average, their obstinacy was abnormal. That type, in a narrow trench which had to be held at all costs, would have been invaluable ; commanding a battlefield that embraced

*Long struggle
to achieve
unity of
command*

three continents their vision was too limited and too fixed. It was not a survey, but a stare. It was not that they were incapable of seeing anything except what was straight in front of them, it was that they refused to look at anything else and counted it a dereliction of duty to turn their eyes in any other direction.

In politics, in medicine and in religion one often meets the man with the fixed idea. Whatever the evil, there is but one remedy. It is the cure-all. Every other idea is a side-show. It is a waste of time and energy to pursue them. It distracts attention and devotion from the saving principle. I discovered in the War that the military profession is no exception to the rule.

At the time of the Nivelle offensive in the spring of 1917, public sentiment in Britain was not in the least enamoured of the idea that a French General should have the supreme direction of a joint operation. Unfortunately, the risk of the experiment was not vindicated by the result. The operation failed on that wing of the wide battlefield where the Commander-in-Chief personally directed the attack. He was discredited in the eyes of his own Army, which mutinied against his leadership, and he was finally dismissed from his command by the Ministry which appointed him. This was an unhappy precedent to commend unity under a French General. On a smaller scale the experiment was repeated when six French divisions were placed under Haig at the Battle of Flanders. But even that limited effort at unity achieved nothing which served to recommend the idea of the united command. No one in urging his plan for a Generalissimo could point with pride

*Set-back
over Nivelle
offensive*

and confidence to the sodden battlefields of Flanders and say, "See what unity has accomplished here."

There was the additional difficulty that the War had not yet thrown up a victorious General. With the exception of the Marne there had been no clear victory on the Allied side which had produced any decisive results, and there were many competitive claimants for the honour of that triumph.

Pétain never gave me the idea of a General whose personality or genius could lead huge armies to victory in a war where, at the right moment, a crashing attack was essential to defeat your formidable enemy. He was an able man and a good soldier.

*Pétain's
limitations*

But he was essentially a Fabius Cunctator. He was careful and cautious even to the confines of timidity. His *métier* after the 1917 mutinies was that of a head nurse in a home for cases of shell-shock. The French Army after three years of unspeakable horror culminating in the shambles of the Chemin des Dames badly needed such attention. Pétain did it well and successfully. There is no other French General who could have done it as well. He did not irritate the frayed nerves of his patients with constant alarms and offensives. Nevertheless, Foch's summing-up of him to Poincaré will be acknowledged by those who knew him as accurate and fair: "As second in command, carrying out orders, Pétain is perfect, but he shrinks from responsibility, and is not fitted for a Commander-in-Chief." Both Poincaré and Clemenceau constantly complained of his pessimism. He was inclined to dwell on the gloomiest possibilities of a situation. Poincaré, in his Diary, said that in the German offensive Pétain was "defeatist." He would have made an ineffective Commander-in-Chief

for Allied Armies confronted with the problems of 1918.

The French would not have agreed to the choice of Haig for the chief command of both armies.

Haig
inacceptable The fighting was on their soil. They could not have left to a foreign General the emancipation of French soil from the invader. Moreover, their Army was still much the largest. Apart from that they had no confidence in Haig's qualifications for such a position. They regarded him as a stout and stubborn fighter on conventional lines. But they knew only too well that he was devoid of the intellectual and personal gifts that make great commanders. He did not possess imagination, breadth or magnetism. For these reasons his name was never mentioned as a possible Generalissimo.

Who was left? Foch was known to be the ablest French General, but he had been withdrawn from the battle front for over a year. His
Foch under
a cloud intervention and guidance in the first Battle of Ypres had been superb. But the terrible losses sustained by the French in the Artois offensive in 1915, for which Foch was entirely responsible, temporarily destroyed the confidence hitherto reposed in his genius. His ruthlessness and his traditional belief in the policy of attack had cost his country dearly in French lives. The prolonged and bloody Battle of the Somme, when Foch commanded the French Army, showed considerable generalship which won much ground without undue losses, but it did nothing to recapture his prestige, for it accomplished nothing which satisfied French opinion. This offensive once more disappointed the hopes of a break-through. I saw

Foch during that battle and I thought him a subdued and somewhat dejected remnant of the ebullient and triumphant Foch I first met. A severe motoring accident had shaken him badly. It took him months to recover fully. When his vigour was restored he was made principal military adviser to the French War Office in succession to a General of no distinction, General Roques. I remember talking to Albert Thomas about Foch about this date and he said to me : "*Foch est vidé et épuisé.*" This remark exaggerated Foch's physical condition but it fairly represented the general view formed of Foch's prospects at that period of the War. When a man of over 65 has been violently flung on to a wind-screen you may well doubt his fitness to command in the field armies numbering millions at a critical stage in the history of the greatest war ever waged. He did not recover his old resilience and verve until the late autumn. Then they came back with the swell of a spring tide. When he accompanied the French Premier and myself to Italy after the Caporetto disaster I noticed for the first time that the dominating Foch of the first years of the War had sprung into full life and vigour once more. His inspiration vivified the Conference and propelled action.

After the Beauvais Conference of 3rd April was finished we returned to England the same day.

As a mere matter of personal reminiscence I may here record two slight incidents which occurred on the return journey of the British Delegation. The Conference lasted till late in the afternoon, and as there was nowhere on the road where we could expect to have a meal, we decided to picnic on the roadside.

*A picnic on
Clemenceau's
lunch*

Clemenceau had brought a luncheon basket for

himself and his Staff, but having lunched with the President before we arrived, he dispensed with his rations and passed them on to us. We feasted sumptuously on the *charcuterie* which had been provided for the Tiger. Mr. Winston Churchill, who had been to Headquarters discussing the replenishment of lost munitions, had joined us on the road. When we reached Boulogne, the town was in complete darkness, for there was a German air raid impending. We saw long columns of reinforcements marching silently in the dark, and when we came to the quay we witnessed the disembarkation of a number of young "kilties" about 19 years old from the troopships by the light of a single torch. We got on to a "P" boat, a new craft invented to search for and to chase submarines. As soon as we left the harbour the bombs began to fall. There was not a light visible in the Channel, but half-way across there was a sudden illumination which lit up the water almost from shore to shore. A mile or two away we saw a ship which seemed to be on fire from stem to stern. Hull and halyards were all marked out in white flames. They had been smeared with a substance which illumed without burning. This was one of the new devices for detecting submarines that sought to take advantage of dark nights to thread their way between the vigilant greyhounds that were watching the tracks of shipping along our coasts.

Three days after the Beauvais Conference the first German push of the great offensive was arrested.

Somme It had failed to attain its strategic aim,
attack ends : but it was the most notable tactical
German success scored on either side on the
achievements Western Front, since the war of movement
came to an end in 1914. Not one of the Allied

offensives of 1915-16-17 can compare with it in the results achieved. In the course of little over a fortnight, the enemy had penetrated our lines on a 60-mile front and advanced a maximum depth of 40 miles beyond our front trenches. He had captured 975 of our guns, and inflicted on us 188,000 casualties, including 79,000 prisoners and missing. And he had achieved this result when his total forces on the Western Front were approximately equal in combatant strength to those of the Allies, and his gun-power was less. Compare that with the Allied offensives in Champagne, on the Chemin des Dames, at Vimy, on the Somme, and at Passchendaele, when we had a heavy superiority in numbers. On the Somme, as a result of five months' fighting, we advanced a maximum depth of about seven miles, capturing 125 guns and 40,000 prisoners at a cost of 498,000 casualties to ourselves, not counting the French. At Passchendaele we spent nearly four months in winning five miles of useless and quaggy desolation—later to be abandoned in a single night without striking a blow—and in capturing 74 guns and 34,000 prisoners, at a cost of 400,000 casualties.

The total German casualties in their great March offensive, including their fight against the French, were 220,000. Even if their returns are held to be incomplete, and a percentage added to that total, the price paid for this success still remains far below what we paid on the Somme and in Flanders for gains which by comparison with those won in the German offensive had been quite trivial. All the same, for all practical purposes, this brilliant achievement was a costly failure. Amiens had not been captured.

*A brilliant
failure*

A gap had not been effected between the British and the French. The Allied loss had been repaired. The German Army with its diminishing reserves had acquired another useless salient to defend.

Ludendorff is entitled to claim that "it was a brilliant feat." I do not think anyone who has read fairly the history of the War can challenge his further statement that the Germans had accomplished what the English and French had not succeeded in doing, and that in the fourth year of the War. But the fact that the British Army sustained a heavy defeat must not blind us to what it accomplished in the face of great difficulties. The German Army had every advantage which good leadership could confer, the British Army was placed under every disadvantage in which bad generalship could land any troops. The Germans had prepared their plans with the greatest skill, they had worked them out with the greatest care. They massed their troops so that they should hit our line with the greatest force that could be concentrated at the front of attack, they assembled their reserves as close up to their first attacking troops as they conveniently could, so that no time should be lost in throwing them in wherever the need came either for further pressure or to relieve exhausted troops. When more reserves were needed either to overcome unexpected resistance or to exploit an unexpected advance, arrangements had been already made for bringing them up with the utmost celerity from other parts of the line. If the attack did not achieve its ultimate objective it was not through any lack of preparation on the part of the High Command.

What about the British Army? Although Head-

quarters knew the attack was coming, the preparations for defence were of the most slipshod character. As to preparing for counter-attack, which is an essential part of defence, it was bound to be ineffective for lack of reserves ; and as for a counter-offensive, no means had been provided for it. Most of our troops were massed on sectors which, weeks before the 21st March, G.H.Q. knew were not then to be seriously attacked, whilst the 42 miles of a line which, they were abundantly warned, would with the Third Army receive the first impact of an immense force, were lightly held. Most of our reserves were in and behind that part of the line which was the remotest from the battlefield. Although G.H.Q. was warned three weeks in advance that the greatest concentration of the enemy was opposite the weakest part of our line and that the shock would come there, it made no effort to strengthen it or to move any more of our reserves behind it. Haig rejected a proposal for building up a General Reserve of 30 divisions, two-thirds of which would have been drawn from other armies and which would have been available to support our hard-pressed troops when attacked by overwhelming numbers. And we made no other arrangement for assistance from the French which could be termed a working plan for mutual support.

Taking the whole front the opposing forces were substantially equal, with a real mechanical superiority on the Allied side. But we so disposed our forces that for the first four days of the battle the enemy had an advantage of three or four to one in men and an even greater superiority in guns, most of our men and guns being kept at the extreme end of our line from the

*Local
superiority of
Germans*

battle-field. The Official History tries to persuade us that Haig was right in keeping most of his army as far away as possible from the area of the impending battle. It seems a novel theory that the further reinforcements are away from the fight the more useful they are when they are needed ! They are much more helpful when they are three days' journey from the battlefield than if they are only a few miles behind ! How these great Generals presume on the ignorance of the common man !

The first reserves only came into action after our lines had been broken through by an overwhelming weight of men and guns. Our soldiers were never given a fighting chance of winning. Under such conditions there are plenty of historical precedents for the bravest men being seized with panic and running away from the battle. My great fear during all these anxious days was the recollection of Napoleon's saying at St. Helena, in explaining the *sauve qui peut* of Waterloo : " The bravest armies have all in turn been seized with panic, and the question then is whether you can rally them in time before they disperse." In the Battle of Amiens there was confusion, disorder, retreat, a muddle of broken divisions, but there was no panic, no *sauve qui peut*. There was no flight of terror-stricken mobs escaping from pursuing Death. They never ceased fighting. They sought opportunities for resistance right to the end. When out-flanked or driven from one position they looked out for another where they could make a stand. Officers rarely experienced any difficulty in lining them up for a fight whenever they found a suitable position where they could temporarily hold up the enemy. Their trouble was that there were

*Magnificent
fight of
Fifth Army*

so few prepared positions which they could occupy. An entrenchment or machine-gun emplacement which only existed on a notice-board was not a defensible position. And the shallow groove of spitlocked trenches was no shelter against artillery or rifle fire. G.H.Q. however could not afford to provide them with anything better, and concentrated the labour resources on favoured sectors which were not likely to be assailed. So the soldiers of the Fifth Army—the outcasts of Passchendaele—had to choose some convenient hump to shield them from the German guns whilst they were doing their best to delay the advance of the German infantry. The first day the line was ruptured, but the spirit of the troops was never broken to the end. When men were severed from their own units they joined up with others whom they found putting up a fight to hold up the German advance. Odds and ends of men who were not in the fighting ranks at all—engineers, labour companies, cooks, servants—picked up rifles, lined trenches, formed up little battalions and brigades of their own with the help of men who in the confusion of such a battle had strayed from their own units. The American engineers, who were helping us to throw up defences around Amiens, threw down their engineering tools, picked up their rifles and fought with valour beyond praise, side by side with an improvised gathering of strays, to arrest the enemy advance. There were many cases where the victorious masses of the enemy were held up by the heroic resistance of individual battalions and companies here and there on the battlefield, so that time might be gained for the meagre reserves that were tardily spared to creep up before the enemy could reach his final objective. This is not an imaginative

picture, painted from reports made by British general officers anxious to minimise the episodes of the defeat. It is confirmed by much testimony from German eye-witnesses. It is worth quoting a few *German tributes to its quality* extracts from an account written by a distinguished German General,* compiled from reports which came to him. This is taken from his record of the opening day's fighting, March 21st :—

“ In spite of the mist, the English artillery, firing by the map, yet managed to render good service to the infantry in their desperate struggle, and in many cases hung on till the last moment. The guns might well fall into the hands of the Germans, after they had been fought right up to the time when they were under German machine-gun fire ! The battery officers with their crews then threw in their lot with the infantry, and helped to reinforce their weakened fronts. . . . The sturdy resistance of the English brought it about that already on the afternoon of the 21st the 39th Division (Second Line) had to join in the battle of the Lindequist sector. . . . The nearer the 126th Regiment gets to the Lagnicourt-Louverval-Doignies road, the stronger becomes the enemy artillery fire. After crossing this road, the right wing of the 3rd Company is forced to suffer heavily from the fire of an English machine-gun nest.”

On March 22nd :—

“ Those in front who had sought and found in shell-holes or in trenches which they dug themselves,

* Lieutenant-General Kabisch : “ Michael.”